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THE LAND OF ETERNAL SPRING

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THE LAND OF ETERNAL SPRING

GUATEMALA, MY BEAUTIFUL COUNTRY

By

LILY AGUIRRE

THE PATIO PRESS
New York

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BY GANIS AND HARRIS, NEW YORK

TO MY DEAR FRIEND
DOROTHY HABERSHAM STANDISH

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THE LAND OF ETERNAL SPRING

LAY OF THE LAND

Famed for its scenic beauty, health-giving climate, and colorful Indians, my homeland, Guatemala, is also just the sort of fabulous country in which imaginations soar and people live romantic lives. In this book I give some of the stories and personalities which this fair land has produced, some highlights of its dramatic history, some of its favorite Indian myths, early Spanish miracles, the ghost tales and quaint folkways that have survived to the present day. Through all these glimpses runs a thread of the devotion that Indian and white man have always had for their "land of eternal spring," this refreshing spot in the tropics, this garden where orchids and roses, pines and bananas grow, this exotic refuge whose customs and costumes of far-off centuries flourish within a few air hours from the skyscrapers of the United States.

Much of the charm and variety of nature and man in my homeland is due to its exceptional geography. On the Atlantic and Pacific coasts of Guatemala you find yourself in hot lowlands where cacao, sugar-cane and banana grow at their best. Here, too, are vast cattle ranches from which we get meat and an abundance of milk and delicious cheese. From these belts of true tropics, the land soon rises steeply to a great plateau. A good deal of this plateau is rolling country, of incredibly rich volcanic soil, with plantations producing some of the world's finest coffee. Here on the plateau are most of our more important towns and the capital, Guatemala City, with its up-to-date buildings and imposing airport. Surrounding each town are finely tended truck gardens and orchards. The patios inside the houses are shaded by trees whose leaves stay green throughout the year and are embellished with vines bearing fragrant blossoms in joyous eternal profusion. Together with products of the cooler regions, such as vegetables, apples, pears, and peaches, and the tropical fruits of the coastal plains, Guatemala has practically every food desired by modern man. Nothing you really want is ever out of season in this most favored land.

Wherever you may be on the balmy Guatemalan plateau, you can see mountains and peaks of rhythmic silhouette under a deep blue sky. Some thirty-three of them are volcanoes, two of them in continual eruption, throwing white plume-like clouds into the heavens. The other volcanoes are covered with forest or pasture, and some have lakes of cold water in their craters. Since this is a volcanic area, there are medicinal springs scattered widely over it, some hot, some warm, others cold.

Within easy reach of the capital are charming lakes for boating and swimming. To many travelers, Lake Atitlan is the most perfect, the most enchanting spot in all the world. Then there is lovely Amatitlan and some eighteen other lakes. The striking, awe-inspiring scenes all about you, with graceful peaks mirrored in azure lakes, have led many to call Guatemala the Switzerland of America and to claim for it a beauty surpassing that of Switzerland and the Italian lake country.

Above the eternally mellow plateau-land lie regions where Indian villages dot rugged mountains. Here there is another distinct change of climate, to a coolness demanding woolen clothing through most of the year. Finally, at the other extreme and resembling the tropics of the coasts, is the wide wilderness of Peten, extending north from Guatemala's Atlantic shores toward Yucatan. In little-known Peten are virgin forests of hardwoods and jungles hiding many cities of the ancient Mayan culture.

Twice a year great flocks of dark grey falcons, which we call *azacuanes,* fly over Guatemala. About the middle of May their passage announces the eagerly awaited beginning of the rainy season, and about the middle of October they whirl once again in great circles through the sky, bringing the equally welcome dry season. In the spring, the Indians say "the *azacuanes* are going to release the waters," and in the fall that "they are about to shut off the rain." But whether the season be dry or wet, the temperate area of the plateau, where the great majority of all Guatemalans live and which is the part of the country to which most visitors come, continues idyllically springlike. Few regions on earth are as free from extremes of dampness and drought, wind and heat.

This multi-facetted paradise of Guatemala is haven to a remarkable variety of plant and animal life: Some three hundred species of trees grow here. There is about the same number of species of fish, among them the strange and rare *cuatro ojos* (four eyes), and over four hundred species of birds, including various types of wild turkeys and brilliant-feathered pheasants, some wonderful songsters, and the sacred, beautiful quetzal which has become the nation's symbol because of its love of freedom. In tropical Lake Izabal, whose outlet is the picturesque Rio Dulce, the prettiest of our rivers, dwells that rarest of mammals, the weird manatee. Those curious beasts, the tapirs, the *tecuanburro,* the *jabali* or peccary, as well as the jaguar, puma and deer, haunt the more inaccessible woods. Large areas of jungle and forest still tempt the nature-lover and the explorer in search of long forgotten Mayan cities. But these wilds are destined to become farmlands in the future. For, like the United States a century ago, Guatemala has its many local frontiers ever pushing their way forward as modern methods clear the astonishingly fertile land for a population which is rapidly increasing.

Three dramatically different human cultures share this nation that nature has so exuberantly and wholesomely endowed. More than half of the population, which totals not much above three millions, are pure-blood Indians who continue as before the coming of the *conquistadores* to live virtually as their Mayan ancestors did. Because ravines, mountain chains, and lakes divide the country into a "patch-work quilt" of tiny regions, each of the many villages has its own unique habits and traditions, speaks its own Mayan dialect, proudly wears its own brightly decorated handmade costume. Incredibly diverse, for this geographic reason, are the nation's handwoven textiles and pottery, which even today are as beautiful as those that, with local river gold, lured the white man first to enter this fair land.

Then there are the grandiose ruins and living folkways of Spanish colonial times, when the capital of Guatemala was a magnificent cultural center—long before any comparable city rose in the present United States. Finally, not fused with these preceding cultures but sharing the country in amiable fashion with them, is the streamlined life of fine hotels, railways, highways and airports, radios and hygiene, efficiently run mechanized plantations and budding industries, colleges and museums, cultured circles of Guatemalans who combine progressive thinking and a cosmopolitan outlook with an old-time dignity and courtesy.

Most phases of the little world that is Guatemala have been depicted in memoirs, poetry, and novels in Spanish. Some have been recorded in books available in English. Unfortunately, among them is a small number written by tourists who spent a few weeks among us, hired uniformed Indians as guides, made deplorable mistakes, and repaid our hospitality by ridiculing us—giving a false impression of my beautiful country which I hope I can correct.

I have selected for inclusion here primarily the most human, exotic folk stories which other books have neglected. Many of the imaginative bits that I have grouped here in their historic and natural settings I first heard told me by old Indian servitors of my family when I was a child and young girl. For their wise guidance during my search for further legends and historic data I wish to thank my brother, Don Jorge Aguirre y Matheu, my cousin, Margot Asturias de Andreu, and the following friends: Mr. William D. Allen; Don José Luis Reyes and Don J. Fernando Juarez Muñoz, librarian and secretary respectively of the Sociedad de Geografia e Historia de Guatemala; Don José Antonio Villacorta C.; Don Flavio Rodas N.; Don

Humberto R. Castellanos; Don Juan Echeverria L.; Don José Llarena Zirion; Don Miguel Rubio Z.; Don Carlos A. Villacorta. For the pictures which they have kindly allowed me to use in this book, thanks are due to Biener & Cia., Mr. Luis Legrand, and Mr. E. Eichenberger.

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THE MIGHTY AND MYSTERIOUS MAYA

Quirigua

Breathless after the steep climb, I stood on a knoll at ancient Quirigua. Here and in the jungle at my feet were some of the greatest of all monuments created by aboriginal Americans—ruins of beautiful temples built over thirteen centuries ago, and huge monoliths up to twenty-six feet high above the ground and weighing as much as fifty tons, erected and exuberantly carved by the Maya Indians to the greater glory of strange gods. Looking far across the lush steaming valley of the Motagua River, I could see the Honduras mountains where lies another great Mayan city of long ago, Copan, whose ruins together with those of Quirigua represent the height of sculpture reached by Indians of the Americas.

As I descended and walked slowly among the ruins, a copper-brown Indian peddler, bearing a heavy load of corn ears on his back, came by and stopped near me before one of the enormous blocks of brown sandstone. His gaze was fixed on the stone face in the center of the monolith, so much like his own in features and even in coloring that he might have been the model for it. The carved face, austere, mysterious, beautiful in a virile way, stood out strikingly from the intricately sculptured maze around it: finely detailed headdress, reproducing the long curving feathers of the quetzal bird, and jewelry, and hieroglyphs. Awe filled the Indian peddler's deep-set slanted eyes as he stood looking at the monument. His lips moved, perhaps murmuring a prayer. As he turned to go, he looked at me and smiled. "My people made that," he said proudly.

He trudged on along the path, heading for the yellow bungalows of the banana workers that cluster in a sea of banana trees, each cottage high on its concrete stilts. All I could see of the small squat figure of the man as he moved slowly away was the immense load of corn on his back.

Corn, always they had corn, that precious golden grain on which Guatemala's Indians of today and the Maya ancestors of ages past have all depended. This maize, the wheat of the Americas, originated in the high plateaux of Guatemala and southern Mexico. Scientists drew this conclusion from the close kinship of the corn plant to the *teosinte* grass which is found nowhere except in these highlands. The Indians tell a charming legend about the origin of corn, a tale no doubt repeated from father to son since the early days of the Maya civilization, before Homer and Troy, before Joseph stored away the grain of Egypt.

One day, so the legend goes, the creator god Bitol and his consort Tzacol were approached by four animals with human bodies, the Coyote, the Jaguar, the Parrot and the Eagle. Saying they had a surprise to show the gods, they persuaded the old couple to accompany them. When Bitol and Tzacol reached a prairie across which flowed a wide stream, the four spirit creatures pointed out a small child lying by the river bank. The child had been born from a wave of the river and a beam of sunlight. The tiny boy was so beautiful that the two creator gods took him home with them and raised him with their own children. They gave him the name of Teosinte.

When Teosinte grew to young manhood, he fell in love with Ma-ix, the youngest daughter of his foster parents. The two married and, against the wishes of her parents, Teosinte took his bride away, to live in a grotto by the river of his birth. Months passed and, as the young pair never returned to visit the bride's parents, the creator gods became anxious and finally went to look for the pair. But at the place where Teosinte and Ma-ix had settled, they found only two graceful plants growing side by side. Both plants bore leaf-wrapped ears from which hung silky red hair like that of Teosinte. Inside all the ears were grains white and pearly like the teeth of Ma-ix. The less attractive of the two plants the gods left alone to grow wild, for they believed it must be the spirit of Teosinte, and they felt angry with him for having taken away their daughter. As for the more beautiful of the two plants, they believed it held the spirit of their lost child and named it *Maiz* in memory of her. This plant they tended carefully, nursing its offspring along so that its pearly kernels should multiply in the ears. It was the ancestress of the corn we have today.

Just as the gods decreed, the *teosinte* continues to be a wild weed, and clings to the highlands. But corn or maize has been eagerly cultivated, its culture spreading into the lowlands and far beyond for some three or four thousand years. By the time Europeans reached the New World, most tribes in the Americas were growing it.

Corn was first domesticated in the Guatemala highlands. Then it became known to the hunting nomads in the Peten lowlands of northern Guatemala, where today the descendants of the Maya are kept busy collecting chicle gum from trees for the chewing gum industry. Here in Peten, some twenty-five hundred years ago, the Maya natives found they could live much better on corn than on wild game and wild roots, and so they settled down to develop one of the greatest civilizations the world has ever known. As centuries passed and the Maya people rapidly increased, they became organized into city states which moved from site to site in large colonies through the virgin forest searching for more favorable living conditions and richer soils. Many of the groups moved southward, forming in the early centuries after Christ such splendid cities as Copan, and shortly afterwards, Quirigua.

Corn, which they developed in countless colors, even jet black, continued to be their main food and sacred Tree of Life. Unfortunately, their method of cultivating it was wasteful of the land. The farms which surrounded each city were created out of the primeval forest by pulling up shrubs and killing trees. This the Maya did without metal tools, using stone knives to cut a deep ring around the tree trunk so that sap could not rise and the tree would die. When the vegetation dried, it was burned. Then, just as the more primitive Indians still do today, the ancient Maya jabbed holes in the earth with a stick and dropped a few grains of corn into each hole, covering it over with a motion of a bare foot. A black bean was dropped into the hole at the same time, and sent up a vine that twined itself around the growing corn stalk.

The Maya soon found that corn-growing sapped the earth, giving only three-fourths as much yield the second year. After this discovery, the farmers went through the same process of clearing and burning new land each year, only returning to their first clearing after three or more years had allowed the jungle to grow over it once more. They were not concerned about this waste of the land for there was always new rich soil to go to. But after every two hundred years or so of glorious development, the need for fresh farmland forced the residents of each great city to move as a body to another place to start over again. Some think that malaria may have been a contributing factor in these curious migrations, which left many beautiful cities to be conquered by exuberant jungle. It was once believed that yellow fever epidemics drove the Maya from place to place, but now it seems fairly certain that this dread disease first came to the New World with Negro slaves from Africa in the sixteenth or early seventeenth century.

It is possible that the deeply philosophic Mayan priests understood that human nature tends toward dullness or restlessness when there is no change. Migration arouses a people to new hope and reaffirmed faith in its leaders. In the Old Empire which stretched across the lowlands from Copan northward all through the early Christian period until the eighth century, the Mayan city states seem to have been at peace with one another. What fighting there was took place as aggressions against outlying tribes which had not adopted Mayan gods and customs.

In any case, whichever the causes, the abandoned cities were left intact, not burned or with their monuments mutilated by an enemy. Today, if you travel north from Quirigua and through the wilds of Peten, you can see ruins of still unexplored ancient towns through the jungle. Or if you walk through forests in northeastern Guatemala, you can find areas where trees bearing edible fruit grow thicker than in most of the jungle. Where many fruit trees grow, you may be sure some forgotten Mayan city once stood.

There were two periods of Mayan greatness called by our historians the Old and the New Empires. The heart of the Maya country during the Golden Age of the Old Empire, in the sixth and seventh centuries A.D., was one of the most densely populated regions of the world. Its cities were as splendid as those of Greece, Rome, Byzantium, ancient China, India, and especially Egypt, to which Mayan culture bore a most striking resemblance. The people, mostly artisans and farmers, lived a simple life not very different from that of the Maya Indians of today. They shared in the welfare of a bounteous and peaceful world. While corn and beans were their staple foods, this earth abounded in a variety of other good things. Tapir, deer, wild pig, the delicious *armadillo,* wild turkeys and pheasants were hunted for food in the forest. A species of dog was raised specially to eat, and fish and shellfish were popular. Food was flavored with chile, allspice, and oregano. Cacao was carefully grown; from it a beverage was made and its kernels served also as the standard measure of values, as the "money" of the Maya. From corn, honey and various fruits the people made mildly intoxicating drinks, the commonest of which, called *chicha,* is still prepared by the Guatemalan Indians. On the farms grew several kinds of pumpkins and sweet potatoes. Various root vegetables still used in the Caribbean region were grown or dug in the forest. The wild tomato was well liked.

As to the golden skinned banana so widely cultivated for export to the United States nowadays in the Guatemala lowlands, especially in the rich wide valley between Quirigua and the sea, it was brought to the New World in 1516 by a monk from the Canary Islands. Here in Guatemala it flourished far better than in its original home. By the nineteenth century it had become an important product of the land and by 1900 the remarkable export traffic in this tropical fruit was well launched. In the Quirigua region today, a seemingly endless sea of beautiful banana leaves extends on every side. The jungle has vanished, conquered by this invading sea, except for occasional islands of palms and ceiba trees and huge vines, as in the park surrounding the monoliths and temples of the once mighty city at Quirigua.

While the poor of ancient Quirigua dwelt on its outskirts in small thatched huts, the priestly aristocracy lived in the heart of the city in handsome stone and stucco palaces. But all shared in the glory of the magnificent temples. Here, as in all important Mayan cities, religious ceremonies were conducted in finely proportioned courts located in the civic center. When a festival was to take place, the temples were decorated with flowers and, on special occasions, the finest of foods were offered to the gods, and animals and human beings were sacrificed.

The people thus immolated were often prisoners of war. For a few days before their death, the designated victims had the privilege of going freely wherever they desired, as long as they kept in sight of their soldier guardians. They could enter any house, even the palace of the king, and sit with him at mealtime. As the Maya were very fond of smoking, they also got all the tobacco they wanted. Nothing was denied them.

Human sacrifices were intended to appease the gods responsible for inflicting hurricane, flood, drought, earthquake or sickness on the people. A Maya who died for such a cause felt he was giving his life for the welfare of family and friends. His death was a mystic sort of honor, a religious equivalent to the modern glory of dying in a battle. When the disaster was particularly severe, the victims sacrificed were children. For, just as in primitive Greece and Europe, virgins were deemed the sacrifice likeliest to appease the dragon, the Maya believed innocent blood most welcome to their gods.

In the course of the dramatic ceremonies of the sacrifice, the High Priest officiated as the throng looked on. The actual killing of the victim was left to a lesser priest whom the public regarded with some repugnance and fear. The executioner quickly gashed a deep slit in the victim's left side, reached in his hand and drew out the still living heart which he handed to the High Priest. Blood from this throbbing heart was reverently sprinkled upon the monument dedicated to the god to be appeased.

Quirigua alone still has twenty squat rocks which served as altars. From their form and the carvings on them they have received such nicknames as the Head of the Serpent, the Great Turtle, the Armadillo, the Frog. Then there are thirteen tall shafts, even more beautifully carved, each bearing a date, and each linked to the glorification of the gods and the Mayan priesthood.

A long development preceded the building and the highly civilized chiseling of the mighty monuments still to be seen in Quirigua and many other Guatemalan sites of the Maya Old Empire. As in most civilizations, the Maya first became skilled workers in mahogany and the other fine hardwoods found in Guatemala forests. The origin of their wooden idols, prior to their carving of stone, is told in the following legend.

A Mayan king, tens of centuries ago, had an only son to whom he was passionately devoted and who had been raised with the most tender care to be his successor. But the youth fell ill and died, leaving his father inconsolable. The people showed the deepest sympathy for their king and showered him with attentions, but he wept ceaselessly and seemed in danger of dying of his grief. To save his life, his priests called upon the devil to help them. The devil told them to have their best wood carver make a statue in the likeness of the dead prince. When this was done, everyone recognized that the resemblance was perfect. Then the devil introduced himself into the wooden statue which became warm and full of life. The old monarch, who was nearly blind from weeping, believed the image to be his son. He stopped grieving and reigned long and happily. Many years later when he died he named the statue as his heir.

In those legendary times of wooden images, the Maya also revered boulders and strangely shaped rocks. The priests, according to the old traditions, kept in the temples sacred stones that had magic powers. One of these, which bore a similarity to a human face, shed tears to announce the imminent death of some high personage in the government. Another shook and moved about when some danger menaced the kingdom. There were two which the High Priest consulted when the tribe was in trouble or when the ruler was uncertain how to decide some major issue. One of these two rocks was smooth and shiny as a mirror. After the prescribed prayers were said, the priests questioned it.

The stone answered by showing on its surface the course of action which would achieve the desired result. The other stone talked when sprinkled with human blood, giving wise advice—provided the question it was asked concerned the welfare of the people.

Many centuries before the founding of Quirigua, the Maya in the Peten region had learned to make beautiful carvings in limestone, as relics found in the ruins of such sites as Tikal and Palenque indicate. Too, their early sculptural and architectural skill is proven by the vestiges recently discovered at Uaxactun of the earliest meteorological observatory in the Americas, dating from before the Christian era, and by the still wonderful stelae which the Maya set up regularly every five years from 378 to 533 A.D. in a city whose ruins are known today as Piedras Negras.

The only hard tools the Maya used were fashioned of the black glassy obsidian found in volcanic areas. In that period, too, they had become adept at preparing large blocks of stone with which they built palaces and temples. Sand mixed with water was ground into a groove in the rock by rubbing a cord back and forth. They had also learned that by twirling a stick against even as hard a stone as jade, they could bore a hole, provided of course that sand mixed with water was used as the abrasive. Similarly, with the twirling of a hollow bird bone, they cut little cylinders out of jade from which beads were fashioned.

By the time the Maya built Quirigua into one of their greatest cities, their stone cutters had reached a skill which few sculptors of any age have surpassed. The craftsmen delighted in showing to what extent of detail they could carve the fine-grained sandstone quarried in the hills three miles away. Although centuries of ninety-inches-a-year rainfall have passed over these exquisite yet giant monuments, and moses and plants covered them until their discovery a hundred years ago, there has been only a slight softening of the faces of the old gods, of the chiseled records of the Mayan religion and the elaborately pictorial and charmingly ornamental language in which the Maya told on those rocks whatever was most important to them.

Surprisingly, especially since they were Americans, the Maya were indifferent about letting the future know of their individual leaders, their national woes and triumphs. No battle scene has ever been found among the Old Empire carvings. As far as their great monuments tell their story, the Maya considered of significance only the glory of God in the many strange forms in which He manifested Himself to them, the recording of time, and the doings of heavenly bodies, particularly those of the moon and the planet Venus. If Christianity had not had a highly personal Saviour and many individual saints, Byzantine and Gothic monuments might have told a comparable "anonymous" tale of the grandeur of God and the Church.

Inevitably, however, the artist revealed the little mundane facts of his day in these grandiose carvings. Eternalized in them are the weave of the mats on which royalty sat cross-legged, the way in which quetzal plumes were worn in the headdresses of kings. Animals and plants and birds are recognizable, and the patterns of ancient embroidery and lace which themselves have vanished. The features of the old gods and priests chiseled in the Quirigua sandstone are easily identified with the race of humble Indians living today in the Guatemala highlands and the Peten wilderness.

Corn and the mysterious serpent are major themes in Mayan carvings. From a modern point of view, I should say the great stone head of Yum Kax, the Corn God, found at Copan, is surely one of the most beautiful of all Mayan carvings. Another rare treasure now in the Archaeological Museum in Guatemala City is a disc, recently unearthed, upon which the corn plant, the Mayan Tree of Life, is shown in relief. On either side of the maize stalk is the figure of a god, one personifying the spirit, the other the flesh. The plant has twenty leaves, mystically representing the twenty human fingers and toes. The Maya believed that all man's thoughts, emotions, sensations, came and went by way of the toes and fingers—a concept which probably explains why their system of counting was based on twenty instead of on tens or dozens as are our systems of today.

In Quirigua and in all Mayan sculptures the serpent motif is repeated over and over, often trimmed with the sacred plumes of the quetzal bird. It was to them the emblem of supreme virtue. Very common also is a cross, similar to that of Christianity. It was used by the Maya long before the birth of Christ and was called the Xucut. It may have symbolized the form of flames, of fire. Or perhaps the daily rotation of the sun which they worshipped. But that ardent explorer of Mayan thought, Ovidio Rodas Corzo, believes that the Xucut cross was their emblem of the infinite, of the universe. It meant, he thinks, eternal life. He traces its carved representation to the same concept as our "four quarters" of the universe. By such crossed lines the imagination can grasp the vision of all four divisions of our earth extending out and out to embrace everything in existence. Even the simplest Maya farmer was familiar with the dividing of land into lots, and could be led to understand through his own experience the vast metaphysical thought of his priesthood. Indian mythology tells how Bitol and Tzacol, the father and mother of all life, made the Xucut cross to divide the universe into harmonious parts.

Based on the one hand upon the patient toil of peasant and slave in rich corn fields, on the other hand Mayan life was raised to high levels by the sciences, philosophy and artistic judgment of an hereditary priestly aristocracy. At least during the Old Empire, before the heart of Mayan culture moved out of present-day Guatemala into Yucatan, the many mighty city states were ruled by men who most likely combined political and religious leadership. These same cliques were in charge of planning the majestic temples and sacred monuments; they held close the secrets of medicine and embalming. Their dentists filed the front teeth of the wealthy into odd forms, inserting topazes and turquoises so that the teeth became veritable works of art. They were very advanced in astrology and mathematics, and developed a calendar to an exactness that baffles modern experts. In the course of their studies, the Maya astronomers came to know how to predict eclipses precisely, and how to foretell the appearance and disappearance of Venus from the eastern and western skies. Much of the power of the clever leaders over the humble citizens depended on their ability to "control" the skies, and they kept their profound knowledge a carefully guarded secret.

Their wise men realized that agriculture depended on an accurate forecast of the seasons, and that this in turn demanded a calendar that could be depended on year by year, century after century. Observations were patiently gathered and the accumulated facts passed on from one generation to the next. In the third century B.C. some brilliant Einstein appeared among them and crystallized all that was known into a system of keeping time which was more exact than our own Gregorian calendar.

The Mayan calendar, used by leaders and common people alike, comprised a five day week, a twenty day month, with eighteen months a year. Five nameless days were left over at the end of the year and every fourth or leap year, they added an extra day as we ourselves do. They considered these final nameless days to be unlucky. In fact, each day of their week was classed as either lucky, unlucky or "neutral." This notion has survived so that the Indians descending from the Maya today guide their daily activities by it to a striking degree. Tuesday and Friday are unlucky, eggs laid on Friday are unlikely to hatch. But a marriage celebrated on Monday will surely be a happy one, and lottery tickets bought on Saturday are likely to win.

As I walked in the bit of jungle at Quirigua and amidst its towering monoliths, I found myself counting my steps by nines and thirteens, influenced no doubt by having learned that day that these were lucky numbers both among the ancient Maya and some present-day Indian peoples. I also heard that if you find a centipede on unlucky Tuesday, according to the old superstition, it will bring you bad luck unless you cut the insect into nine pieces. Do this, and the centipede will bring you good luck. If you see a green snake you may die unless you cut it nine times. A magic potion for relief of skin ailments is prepared from nine pieces of fish skin, nine pieces of corn cob, and nine pebbles. To make a ritual of incantation highly effective, repeat it nine times. This is a belief comparable to that of the European magicians who repeated their invocations of Satan three or seven times to give full power to their wish.

Lucky thirteen was used by the Maya and their descendants mainly in relation to religion. Offerings of thirteen bowls of food, or thirteen cakes, each made of thirteen layers of bean paste and cornmeal, were particularly pleasing to the gods in the Maya Upper World, and nine was considered lucky since there were that many gods in the Under World.

The magic of numbers, the wonder of eclipses, the constant yet fickle influence of unseen forces, led the ancient Maya to closely associate magic and religion with their daily doings. Like the Hindus, and the Egyptians of the past, the Maya had gods who controlled diseases, floods, drought, earthquakes. Before buying or making a sale, the good deity of commerce was paid court to. In times of anxiety or death, other gods were called on for intercession. All classes of society and all trades and professions had their protecting deities. The good forces of nature, the sun, water, fire, all were represented by idols with human characteristics. The Maya were full of fear of possible disaster, and the appeasement of evil divinities was stressed. Later the concept of evil seems to have brought them around to the concept of good.

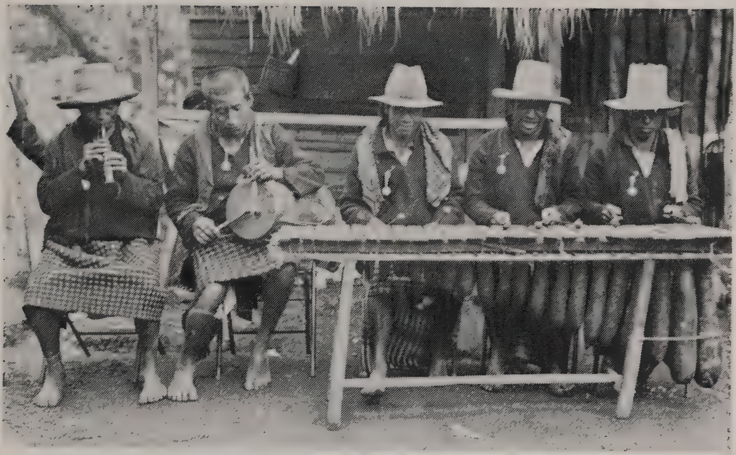
The priestly ruling class, who guided all these elaborate religious practices in such fashion as to assure their own wealth and power, nevertheless taught their underlings to lead loyal, virtuous and honorable lives. So deeply rooted were some of the ancient ethical teachings that even today the hungriest Indian rarely steals corn from the unguarded fields. If you do an Indian a favor, he will most likely insist on repaying you, if only with a humble offering.

The Maya also were taught to have the profoundest respect for their superiors. So above the rank and file was the king considered that he never was permitted to touch the earth. When he walked it was on finely woven fibre carpets and when he went out into the world he was borne in a litter.

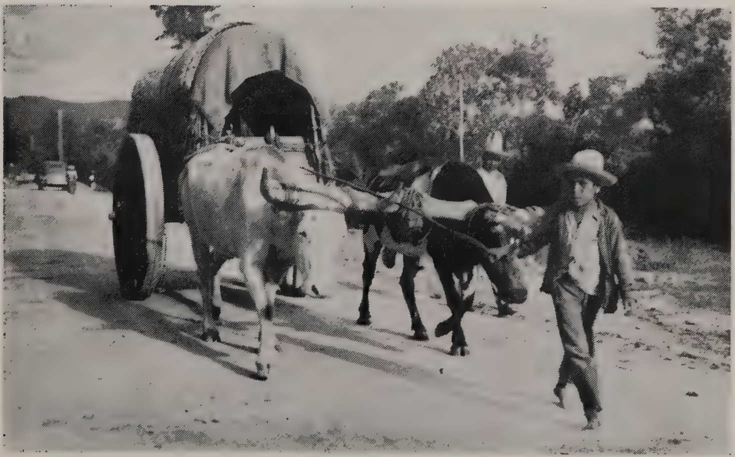
In the days of Maya glory, justice was based on severe and respected law—not on the whim of those in power. The king and a tribunal of judges decided each case. Spying, rebellion, lying, murder and major theft were punishable by death. A person guilty of minor offenses had his eyebrows plucked out or was otherwise disfigured. Commonly a culprit was sentenced to work without pay for the person he had wronged. Adulterers were beaten and then thrown from a cliff.

A folk story reveals that while usually observant of their severe law against adultery, the Maya could also be tolerant and understanding. One clear morning, so the tale of uncertain age goes, King Balam-Quitze sent his two sons, Cocaib and Cocavid, on a mission to far-off King Naxit. Cocaib, the elder of the two young princes, had recently been married, but in spite of his sorrow at separating himself from his beautiful wife, he and his soldiers went boldly out through the dangerous wilderness and reached the city of King Naxit safely. The younger son, Cocavid, coveted his brother's wife and after going only a little way, turned homeward, and reported that Cocaib had been killed fighting an enemy tribe that barred the route.

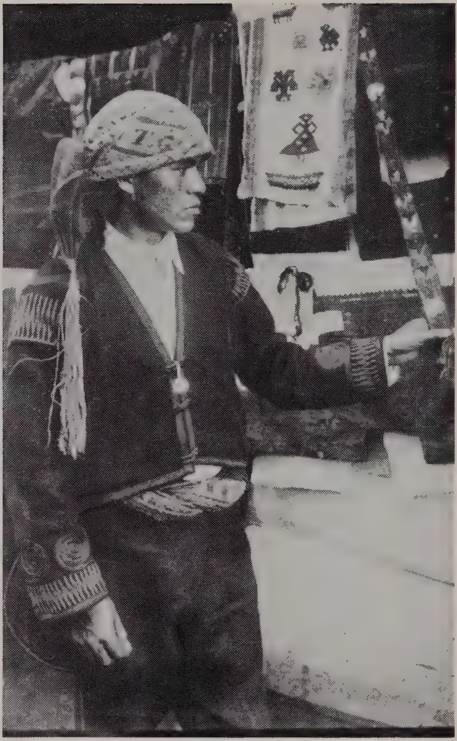
The grief-stricken bride mourned for a time, but then



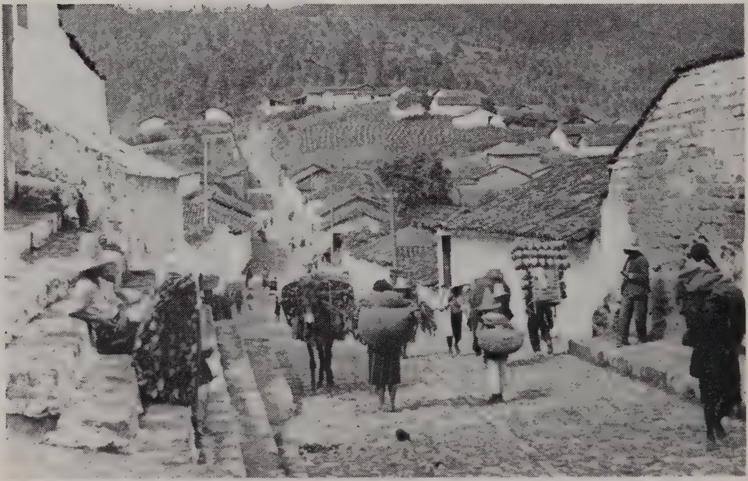
Indians playing a primitive marimba, whose resonance comes from empty gourds below.



Indians going to market to sell their produce. The boy guides the oxen with a long stick.



This Chichicastenango Indian wears a *tzute* on his head.



The main street in Chichicastenango. Some Indians dislike having their pictures taken and turn their backs.

was finally induced to marry Cocavid. They had a son who had already grown to be a strong little youngster when news came that the lost prince was returning. The court went out to meet him, led by the happy old king and followed by a rejoicing throng. In fact the whole city went on a holiday—except the younger brother who fled far away, knowing that death was the punishment of adultery and lying.

Prince Cocaib came brilliantly adorned with jewels given him by his father's friend, King Naxit. His followers brought on their shoulders many gifts: jaguar claws, skins of wild animals, beaks and claws from eagles which the Maya revered as harbingers of good luck. The triumphant Cocaib greeted his wife, and she told him with joy and confusion how he had been reported dead. Her husband noticed the little boy clinging to her skirts and asked, "Who is the father of this child?"

When the trembling wife replied, "The boy is of your own blood," the prince understood what had occurred. Instead of demanding the usual punishment for adultery, he took the boy in his arms and said to his wife, "He is innocent—why make him suffer? He will grow up with our own children."

When the Golden Age of the Old Empire passed, some of the Maya peoples remained in the area of Quirigua and other earlier cities of the Guatemala lowlands. Other tribes went to the high plateau where the capitals of the Spaniards and Guatemala City were later to be established. The main body, however, including the staunchest guardians of Mayan culture, went north into the peninsula of Yucatan, where they founded Chichen Itza and many other noble cities of their New Empire.

Such great monuments as those of Quirigua were never to be equalled by the Maya in their new homes in Guatemala. But when the Spanish conquerors invaded their lands, the Maya jewelers were still skilled artists. Their diligent laborers went on domesticating bees, employing both their honey and wax. Their industries were flourishing, especially that of ceramics, which had always been one of their most important occupations. Confirming this are wonderful vases, urns, dishes and pots which are found wherever an excavation is undertaken. Their differing characteristics reflect the transitions of epochs, and the techniques used indicate the regions in which they were made. Truly, the Mayan pottery illustrates the development of their art and the changing conditions of their lives. Through the centuries the Maya promoted sports. Their courts were always laid out north and south. Their illustrations show that they played a game in which they wore gloves and leather bucklers. Their goal was probably a large ring through which a ball was thrown. They also encouraged the study of music.

The Quiches, who had a higher degree of culture than any other Mayan tribe when the white men arrived, had remarkable schools. Outstanding among them was one where three thousand sons of nobles were educated. Books were still being written by the intellectuals in the beautiful old hieroglyphic language on paper made from local fibers, fine and surprisingly accurate maps were also drawn, and astronomy and mathematics continued to be taught among the priestly and high classes.

The strategy of the white man's conquest demanded the crushing of the power and prestige of the Maya leadership, both in politics and religion. With a stubborn confidence in their gods and institutions, the hereditary leaders guided their people's military resistance. When they were defeated, the Indian wisdom, the keen knowledge of their mathematics, astronomy, hieroglyphs, their remarkable art of embalming, their medicine—all of which had been so esoterically guarded by the ruling class, were lost. Unknowingly, unavoidably, as the Spanish soldiers killed or enslaved the native chieftains, and as the Catholic missionaries destroyed the pagan idols and religious writings, most of the secrets of Mayan sciences were wiped out.

By the time the Spaniards arrived in Guatemala, the splendid older cities like Quirigua had been forgotten and swallowed by the jungle.

Aside from fragments through which much has been learned in recent times about the ancient Mayan wisdom and art, nothing survived except the simpler superstitions and ways of life of the humble farmers and laborers. But much of the lore that the planters of corn and haulers of stone at Quirigua culled from their secretive priests and gifted leaders lives on. The influence of their Maya past is very much a part of present-day Indian habits, costumes, and folk tales, especially in rugged mountain and forest regions of Guatemala. This is particularly true of the Indians in the neighborhood of the romantic city which bears the musical name of Chichicastenango.

2

LIVING CRADLE OF ANCIENT MYTHS

Chichicastenango

STROLLING ALONG a cobblestone street toward the main plaza of Chichicastenango I noticed that the throng of Indians moving in the same direction made no more sound than if they were specters from a legendary past. The men in black embroidered kneepants and short jackets, the women in brightly colored *huipiles,* or blouses, and striped skirts tight around their thighs—all went softly on bare feet or flexible sandals. Nobody spoke. But echoing through the rocky hills was the beating of many drums. From the plaza where the crowd and I were headed came the ringing of bronze church bells, the weird sound of flutes and *marimbas,* a murmur of prayer, the sharp crackling of fireworks. It all sounded like a vast exotic orchestra tuning up before a Mayan Symphony. The greatest of Chichicastenango's festivals was starting, in honor of the local patron, Saint Thomas.

The town's plaza between the chapel of the Calvary and the main church was so crowded that I had more difficulty moving across it than in Times Square. The market was in full swing. On small *petates,* mats woven of water weeds, and under larger ones arranged as shades for the venders, were piles of the delicious apples and peaches which are the pride of this cool hill country. And there were many tropical fruits and vegetables carried here on human backs from the hot lowlands, and a great variety of curious native handicraft products.

Barbers in a row close to the main church were busily snipping at straight stiff black hair of Indians. A coffin-seller stood between gay fruit and flower stalls, playing a lugubrious air on his *chirimia* flute to guide your thoughts in the direction of death. Noble light-brown faces of young women looked up at me, some changeless as Mayan statues, some with smiling eyes. These farmer wives sat hour after hour under canopies of matting or canvas, their wares neatly displayed before them. Often a baby peeked out from the shawl which held it tight to the back of its mother. Some of the baby heads were covered by a gloomy hood, to prevent strangers from casting evil spells over the defenseless little one.

As I approached the wide steps leading up to the tall door of the church, I hid my camera to avoid offending the Indian worshippers. One of them was carrying what seemed a bunch of long reeds, wrapped at the base in a beautiful hand-woven scarf. When he undid his bundle on the church steps I saw that the reeds were attached to sky-rockets. One by one they were sent zooming to the sky as bearers of prayers to God. Near this man, a mother and her three little children knelt while the father prayed fervently for all his household. On the second of the church steps was a stone altar where a fire burned. Such clouds of pungent incense rose from it that sometimes I could not see the church door a few feet beyond.

Once inside the austere white-washed church, I climbed to the wooden balcony. The spacious paved interior below me had no seats. Bright and straight across the dark pavement Indians had strewn flower petals as a path from the large door to the main altar. Along this way came a Catholic priest, blessing the people who knelt on either side, pausing sometimes to say a prayer over a bowed head.

The paving of the church was glossy with wax from the candles that had melted upon it through the years. Pine needles were strewn over the floor, and in places blossoms fallen from branches offered, together with flowers, to the Christian saints. The odor of fresh pine and burning incense made from pine resin and other gums did one's soul good—and discouraged fleas. All over the dark glossy floor, surrounded by rose petals, clusters of candles were burning, each a different constellation to me as I looked down.

An old Indian came in and selected a vacant space of pavement. Kneeling, he set up some candles on the waxy surface before him. He prayed loudly in a singsong voice and in the Quiché tongue. Many times he rose and knelt, kissing the pavement, addressing each altar and image of the church in turn, stretching out his hands in gestures full of some mysterious significance. Silent, close to him, squatted several Indian men and women, listening and watching, their eyes on him. The small bag of the type used to carry beans and quartz crystals needed for divination, the man's air of piety and importance, the sacred rain and thunder symbols embroidered on his jacket, showed me that this intercessor appealing to the holy ones of the Christians for the following at his feet was a pagan *brujo* or sorcerer. In Chichicastenango, our Christian deity and holy personages have the curious status of gods annexed to the ancient Mayan pantheon!—But of course there are also many worshippers here who are fully Christianized.

When the Dominican friars came to this wild isolated region in the sixteenth century, short years after the beginning of the Conquest, the ancient pagan religion was still powerful in Ziguan Tinamit, as Chichicastenango was then called. The Quiché Indians, among whom were nobles and *caciques* who had escaped slaughter by the conquerors, and had fled here when the Spanish invaders destroyed their once glorious capital of Utatlán in 1524, were proud and confident, unconquered in their souls. The Catholic missionaries felt that they could win over these stubborn people only by subtle conciliatory persuasion. So they followed the policy used by the earliest Christian leaders in Europe, adapting the creed of Christ to fit in with established pagan usages. The Church extended a welcome to the Indians without too strict regard for the niceties of ritual and doctrine. Down in the cities of the Guatemala plains the Inquisition came and stamped out heresy. But in these intractable hills, Christianity has deemed itself fortunate if it advances ever so little through the centuries.

Thus it is that even in these modern times worshippers pray to non-Christian gods on the tolerant steps of the Chichicastenango church, and within the temple itself pagans and converts adore the Christian God and the saints with words and gestures often closer to Mayan than Catholic practice.

The early missionaries tactfully associated the pagan festivals dear to the hearts of the natives with the imported faith. In Chichicastenango the great feast of Saint Thomas from December 17 to 22 thus incorporates the timeless Mayan celebration of the winter corn harvest, while Holy

Week preserves many rites once connected with the planting time New Year of the Indians.

The Palo Volador (flying pole) ceremony performed during the Saint Thomas festival is fully pagan. It traces back both to the Aztec dance of the four seasons and to an ancient Mayan myth. Princes Hunbats and Hunchuen were brothers. One day they climbed a tall pine while their younger half-brothers, Junajup and Ixbalamqué, watched from below. Then, as the climbers tried to come down, their mischievous half-brothers used magic to make the tree grow ever higher. Finding they were getting no nearer the ground, Hunbats and Hunchuen anxiously called down, "What can we do?"

The answer came, "Unwind your belts and use them as ropes."

But when the suggestion had been followed, the half-brothers below used magic once more, turning the belts to tails and Hunbats and Hunchuen to monkeys.

Each step in preparing the Palo Volador is full of weird magic. A group of distinguished Indians search through the hills till they find a great straight pine. One of the two men who are to play the part of the monkey-princes, Hunbats and Hunchuen, must sleep for thirteen nights under the chosen tree, while his companion refrains from sexual intercourse for the same period. Then the tree is felled when the sun reaches the zenith, and is trimmed and left to season. Bringing the pole down from the hills is considered an honor, so men eagerly take turns in helping carry it. On the way, fireworks are shot off and music played to announce its coming. One of the monkey-princes marches at the foot of the pole, the other at its head. No women are allowed to approach while all this is going on.

When the plaza facing the church is reached, the long pole is placed beside the deep hole which is to receive it. A *brujo* and men dressed up as wild animals consecrate the tree, burning incense near it, kissing it, then whipping it. Another *brujo* descends into the hole burning *pom,* their sacred incense, and prays at the bottom.

Once erected, a platform is set on the top of the pole. Cords with seats at the ends are twisted round the pole so that the men seated at the ends whirl round and round in widening circles as they descend from the platform to the ground, generally in pairs and dressed as monkeys or birds.

During the Saint Thomas festival the shooting of rockets, which goes on through the year, is closely linked to quaint little Tzijolach, a statue of a man on a horse which can be seen heading all processions during the Saint Thomas ceremonies. Behind him in the processions come men, each with a bundle of a dozen rockets in his arms. In the street parades, Tzijolach is carried by a man dressed as a deer. As the man dances along, the coins adorning the figure tinkle merrily. At other times during the feast days, Tzijolach rides up and down a rope between the ground and the top of the church belfry, for although he looks very much like a Spanish horseman, Tzijolach is really a survival of the god Tepeu of pagan lore, the Mercury of the Maya, whose task still is to carry the prayers of men to the gods above.

Chichicastenango's Dance of the Giants also goes way back to times before the coming of the white men. It is performed by two teams. On one side are the powers of good: two royal figures representing the sun god and moon goddess, who are the grandfather and grandmother of the earth, and two youths playing the parts of those mythical twins, Junajup and Ixbalamqué. Opposing them are two white and two black giants, symbols of evil. The two groups talk and fight while they dance until at last good triumphs over evil.

Still another dance by eight men is given outdoors as a sort of comic performance. One of the male dancers is disguised as a snake, guided by Anix, a midget dressed in white. There are a princess, a devil with bat wings, and an angel. The other three dancers are supposed to impersonate captains. Several other dances are given in Chichicastenango, while others have ceased being performed here although they survive in a few smaller places in the hills. One of these is the Snake Dance. For it a half dozen snakes are captured beforehand with many magic rituals. And there is the Deer Dance, whose preliminaries are similar to those of the flying pole. After the pole is set in place, the dance is given around it. Actors take the parts of Bitol and Tzacol, the legendary progenitors of the Mayan race, as a very aged couple. They are followed by other dancers simulating mankind. Facing them are Indians dressed in skins of lions and other wild animals, for the ritual is a contest between the human race and the animal kingdom. When the latter is defeated Bitol and Tzacol invoke the blessings of the Earth God upon hunters and domestic animals.

Holy Week is almost as dramatic a festival time in Chichicastenango as the Saint Thomas days. An Indian penitent, who feels eager to expiate some great sin, crawls half a mile through the cobblestone streets on his hands and knees, wearing only short white pants and a black hood that conceals his identity. Tied to his back is a heavy wooden cross. In other towns in this area they carry on the same custom, but much elaborated. Men dressed in ancient armor and helmets like the old Roman soldiers, slash the penitent with whips, harass him with spears and even tie him to the cross when he reaches the spot chosen for the simulated crucifixion. Some years back, an Indian died of this ordeal.

In Chichicastenango another purely Christian rite takes place in the church during the Holy Week. A large sculpture of Christ is taken down and bathed by the priest and worshippers. Then some of the pious go around the image on their knees praying.

"Old Judas" is a relic of the Mayan New Year and spring-planting celebration which the early Catholics absorbed into the Christian Holy Week. The Mayan New Year came in March, about the time of our Easter. The "Old Judas" of today is a crude statue made of moss, dressed in old clothes and wearing a mask representing an aged white man. A cigar is put in his mouth. Candles are burned respectfully before him. After days of queer ceremonies in which homage is paid to his image, Old Judas is hanged in front of the Calvary chapel across the plaza from Chichicastenango's main church. Then the mask is removed and the figure is burned.

The Indians have forgotten the origin of Old Judas and most people assume him to be Christ's betrayer. But explorers of ancient pagan rites recognize him as the wicked and mighty god Mam who reigned over the five unlucky days at the end of the Mayan year. In pre-Christian times Mam was appeased and flattered during those days of his power. After his time of evil strength was over, he was burned.

As in the pagan rites of long ago, Old Judas burns to symbolize the end of the old year, the beginning of spring when corn starts growing again and all the world is once more fresh, cleansed of the past.

A fascinating detective game is being played in recent years by Guatemalan and other scholars in finding the origins of strange native traditions like that of Old Judas. Much of the ancient mythology which lives on under a Christian veneer is found in the Popol-Buj, the bible of the Quiché-Maya tribe. This record of pre-Spanish folklore and religion was written by one of the surviving Quiché nobles in the sixteenth century.

Its author, who must have been one of the most clever Indians who retired to Chichicastenango from Utatlán, is believed to have taken the name of Diego Reynoso when he was converted to Catholicism. He is presumed to have written it to perpetuate the glorious traditions of the Quichés, fearing that they would be lost forever in the confusion brought about by the imposition of the new Spanish civilization upon the helpless natives. The Popol-Buj is divided into a prologue and eleven traditions. Besides mentioning their gods, heroes and kings it explains how they selected the twenty-four families who founded the Quiché nobility. Forgotten for almost two hundred years, it was discovered in Chichicastenango by a Dominican friar, Francisco Ximenez. He had served for three decades in churches of Indian villages, had learned the Quiché and Cakchiquel languages and so could translate the book into Spanish.

Among the book's many quaint tales is the account of how the world and man were created. Nothing existed at first, so the Quiché "Genesis" says, except a vast quiet sea and a sunless sky. The gods formed a shining circle of light all around. They were lonely and yearned to be paid attention to. After conferring together they commanded, "Earth!"—whereupon land sprang up in the sea. The gods then created mountains, trees and animals. But the animals proved incapable of worship so the gods decided to make men. At first they made men of clay, but these creatures were ugly, clumsy, stupid and easily fell to pieces. The gods were disappointed and did away with them. Next they made men of wood. These could talk and reproduce but had no gratitude or kind sentiments in their hearts and therefore did not pay reverence to the gods. So the gods sent down a deluge. From it a few escaped and became monkeys—for which reason, the book explains, monkeys look like men.

Finally the gods molded four men out of cornmeal. They were wonderful beings. They could see all over the world. In fact they were almost as omniscient as the gods themselves, and consequently very much lacking in humility. So one of the gods passed a mist over their eyes to limit their vision. From that day till this, mankind has had agility, beauty and deep feelings, but little wisdom. To these men the gods gave beautiful wives so they could multiply.

The Popol-Buj besides narrating the legend of Hunbats and Hunchuen, explains how Junajup and Ixbalamqué were born of a virgin mother, the princess Ixquic. One day she was standing under a tree where were hanging the heads of some men who had been decapitated. One of these spoke, asking Ixquic to raise her hands up. As she did so the head spat on them, whereupon the princess became pregnant. This decapitated head was that of the father of Hunbats and Hunchuen, and through this queer "union" sired Junajup and Ixbalamqué.

Many old beliefs such as those in the Quiché bible are remembered by the *brujos* or pagan priests and witchdoctors, the majority of whom are men although there are a few women among them. These *brujos* exercise great power over the lives of the more primitive Indians nowadays, but nowhere so strongly as in the Chichicastenango region. Here the *brujo* participates in most events in the Indian's life. The natives firmly believe that the success of an undertaking depends on its being done on an auspicious day. Thus the *brujo's* most important work is to determine through divination the safest day for marrying, planting, or for setting out on a voyage. A Mayan calendar rather than our modern one is used in the magic ceremonies.

Another duty of the *brujo* is to interpret to the Indian the advice of his *nahual* or animal protector. There is an old Maya belief that the spirit of each Indian is linked to that of the *nahual* of the day he is born, and is influenced by it throughout his life. If the *nahual* is a jaguar, those born on that day are expected to be ferocious fighters. Those born on the day of the frog are regarded as feeble and with changeable character—always leaping from one thing to another.

The *brujos* are much dreaded, for they can bring down terrible curses upon one. When an Indian wants to take revenge on an adversary, he goes to the *brujo,* explains the conflict and gives details about his enemy. The *brujo* then makes a small doll in wax or cloth which impersonates the victim. By piercing this doll with needles, hanging it upside down, or burying it, he causes all kinds of sickness and even death. But the *brujo* also does pleasant things. He knows how to prepare a powder from the ashes of coyote bones, which when kept in the coat pocket of a man helps him win the girl he has picked to become his wife.

After consulting a *brujo,* the family of a youth who wishes to marry calls on the parents of the girl considered most desirable, taking brandy and food along to share with their hosts on this formal visit. If the girl says, "May I see the house where I am to live?" she goes home the same day with her suitor and their marriage is considered concluded. In some places, the bride is sent back to her family unless she conceives within a reasonable time, for the idea of a home without children is unthinkable to the Indians. When the families are well-to-do they may pay the fee for a civil marriage, after which the Catholic priest marries them according to the Christian rites. But these niceties are hardly the rule in Chichicastenango, where Indians are poor and faith in ancient institutions is stronger than that in the imported religion and government.

The *brujo* is again consulted if the young wife shows signs of ill health during pregnancy. The causes of miscarriage are thought to be anger or unhappiness of the mother, so the *brujo* exhorts the family to refrain from quarreling and to be more harmonious among themselves, for the sake of the expected child.

The Indians have unusual customs concerning death. When a native dies, relatives and friends celebrate the event gaily, since they believe he has passed to a better world. The body is dressed in the finest clothing the dead person owned, and is laid out on a bench in the middle of the room where the wake takes place. Everyone dances around the corpse, to the gayest tunes their musicians know how to play. With much eating and drinking, the party continues till morning, interrupted once in a while by professional mourners who are paid to cry for the dead.

In some villages, the body is then laid in a coffin in which brandy, tobacco, coins and a change of clothing are stored for use of the dead one in the next world. If some article was forgotten in provisioning the coffin it is added to the things buried with the next person to die, who will pass it along to its rightful owner in the world beyond where everything is better than here and people are very honest.

When an Indian is to be buried in Chichicastenango, the coffin is brought to the foot of the church steps. There it is spun around four times under supervision of a *brujo* so as to keep evil spirits from locating and molesting the soul of the departed.

On a hill near Chichicastenango, curiously named Mount Democracy, there is a primitive stone carving of the pagan god of the mountains who sends rain to the crops. The face of the god is black from the smoke of incense burned before him. There are *brujos* usually in attendance upon the god, for the Indians believe that intercession by the wise and holy men adds power to prayers. Crudely cut crosses are left as offerings to the idol, not Christian crosses but the Mayan Xucut, which looks Christian to the many natives whose pagan and Catholic notions are inextricably interwoven.

Indian towns have *cofradías* or select societies of men and women who take active part in Catholic activities although their traditions often include many more pagan than Christian. Each of the fourteen *cofradías* in Chichicastenango takes charge of a saint whose image is kept in the home of the leader of the group. On festive occasions, the *cofradías* march with their images in processions. Most of the images represent orthodox Catholic saints, but some, like Dios Mundo, the earth deity, are Indian adjustments between their own and Catholic ideas.

To cover their expenses, the *cofradías* hold parties that usually last from Sunday noon till Monday morning. To the weird music of a simple primitive *marimba,* made of wood, whose resonance comes from empty gourds below, men dance *el son* and other native folk dances. Each man moves about by himself, slowly hopping, following the rhythm with a large handkerchief or just holding his hands behind his back, sometimes singing but never smiling. Much locally made brandy is consumed at these rather solemn festivities. Women do not generally dance but if one of them feels inspired by the liquor she has had, she joins in the *son,* hopping always by herself, chanting her own troubles and experiences. The *son* is the only dance in which women are permitted to participate.

Drinking is frowned on or applauded by the Indians according to the motive of the drinker. It is highly esteemed by *brujos* and worshippers as an aid in achieving an exalted spiritual feeling. The more intoxicated you are, the more religious you feel. But to get drunk without the wish to raise your spirit towards the gods is a sin. In spite of this tradition, the majority of the natives are delighted by the sensation of drunkenness which confuses their minds. They regard it as the ultimate in happiness.

On Saint Thomas Day, I witnessed a charming ceremony in the main church of Chichicastenango. Some twenty mothers were there, bearing in their arms tiny babies, all born within the year. Around them were relatives and the godparents of the infants. The godparents had cause for the earnest look in their faces, because the relation of a child and its godfather or godmother is a far more serious thing here than among more "civilized" people. If a child's parents should die, the godparents have the responsibility of bringing it up, and if the child dies, they must pay for the funeral.

The people I was watching in church wore the lovely costumes of several different towns, some located at quite a distance, for these were families who had come from other areas of Guatemala to settle here and as usual they continued wearing the costumes of their native towns. Following an old tradition they had come to church in a group to have their babies baptized on the day of the patron saint who guards the welfare of the place where the child was to live. After the touching baptism by the Catholic priest, to the tune of many infant cries, all these children would add Thomas to their other names. When I remarked on the absence of local costumes, the priest told me that he had already christened many groups of Chichicastenango Indians that morning. Those long established in the town would not mix with the newcomers whom they call "strangers."

Because Saint Thomas is their local patron, the thirty thousand inhabitants of the Chichicastenango township, which includes some twenty square miles of farms as well as the town, are nicknamed Maxenos throughout Guatemala. They are energetic traders and peddlers, trudging as far as the coasts with the wares of their own and other hill regions, returning with lowland produce on their backs.

Things were quiet in Chichicastenango right after Saint Thomas Day, so my friends and I often took long walks into the country. Many Indians, mainly Maxenos, were along the roads, for they enjoy going on visits, on pilgrimages, and to markets, although no matter how far they roam they hold to the ways of their natal countryside. Some of them had loaded their products in carts pulled by oxen which they guided with long poles. Others were driving laden mules and horses before them or rode them. But most people along the road were on foot.

Sometimes we passed veritable human caravans. At the head of each came the oldest and most dignified of the family, followed single file by others in order of their importance, with a small child dragging along as rear guard. The average peddler or porter carries his goods packed in a *cacaxtle,* a frame of wood and net held to his back by a cord which has in its center a strip of leather that goes across his forehead. Dangling from the *cacaxtle* are generally seen a lantern, some slivers of resinous red pine for lighting fires, bundles of cooked black beans and cornmeal *tortillas,* with a mat and a *zarape,* a home-made blanket, rolled up on top. And often as pinnacle to the huge load of pottery or foodstuffs rides a little child lashed on for safety. The peddlers average burdens of eighty pounds and travel normally eighteen miles a day. The women carry lighter loads in a *canasto,* a big shallow round basket which they keep perfectly balanced on the head.

The land in which the Indians have their farms all around Chichicastenango is so rugged, so cut by ravines, that to go the twelve miles from Tecpan to Chichicastenango takes almost a day on foot or two hours in a fast car. The natives have their tiny farms scattered through these hills and go to the town only on market days, Thursday and Sunday, and for religious festivals when they visit their friends, drink and dance. The farmers rent or own town houses—like the squires of old England, except that these town houses are humble thatched huts.

In the streets of Chichicastenango during quiet workdays, you notice costumed Indian men only among the servants of the picturesque Mayan Inn. Only Indian women wear their showy costumes every day. You also see a small number of *ladinos* who, in so many other Guatemalan towns, are the permanent townspeople, since most Indians live on the farms. Foreigners commonly assume that *ladino* is a racial term meaning a person of mixed Indian and Latin blood. Actually, although *mestizos* or persons of mixed race are included among them, *ladinos* are all those who have adopted Latin ways, follow the Christian creed, wear shoes, and get along to some extent in Spanish. They are disdainful of those who follow the primitive native traditions. Living in the towns, owning property and running stores, the *ladinos* are more prosperous than the Indians. Their women do not wear the gay hand-loomed local costumes or the exuberant strings of cheap glistening beads interspersed with irregular silver coins called *macacas,* the primitive Spanish coins made in this country, which the Indian women so proudly put on. The *ladinos* look on with contempt while the visitor from afar is fascinated by the Indian male's curious costume: knee pants of black wool, jacket brightly embroidered with sacred pagan symbols, colorful waist band, and a beautiful turban with elaborate designs—a dress the Chichicastenango Indian adopted long ago as an emblem of his descent from the nobles who took refuge here in the early days of the Conquest.

Even the *ladino,* however, finds the charming harmless little Indian superstitions easy to obey and hard to forget—

just as the most modern New Yorker or Chicagoan dislikes seating thirteen at table or walking under a ladder. Some of these old beliefs of the villagers of Mayan tradition are founded on folk observation and may well have a basis in fact. For instance, if swallows fly low, it is believed it will rain soon, while if they fly high, it will be clear next day. When a certain variety of cicada chirps persistently, rain is on its way. But if another variety keeps on chirping a long time, there will be drought.

Other folk beliefs are closer to ancient magic and myth. Sickness is caused by gnomes, but they can be placated and kept outside the home by leaving for them at the door some gourds full of food, one for each member of the family. An oriole singing, a dragonfly coming into the home, a high-flying butterfly, fire hissing, a cat seen washing its face with a paw—all are signs that a visitor is approaching. If a match dropped on the floor burns to the end, the person who dropped it will have a long life. I am sure all of us would like to believe in the Indian superstition which prescribes placing a broom upside down behind the door to hasten the leave-taking of a tiresome guest!

3

INDIANS IN AN AZURE SETTING

Atitlan

In the mythical dawn of the Cakchiquel Indians, the tribe wandered through Guatemala under the leadership of Gagamutz and Zactecauj in search of a permanent home. They suffered much during their long wandering. Wide swift rivers were in their way, but the leaders carried magical red sticks and when these were raised high overhead with appropriate prayers, the waters fell back so the tribe could cross over the river bed with dry feet.

Later in their journey, their way was barred by fierce warriors who flew through the air simply by flapping their arms and legs. This enemy shot poisoned arrows down on the wanderers, forcing them to retreat. Finally the Cakchiquels reached that wonderland, Lake Atitlán, where it is spring all year round and nature is most bountiful, varied and beautiful. Here the Indians rejoiced and decided to stay. But one of the three volcanoes overlooking the lake started shooting up fire and rocks and all the wild animals in the region began fleeing. Some birds paused to warn the Indians to escape quickly. Gagamutz was furious as he had determined to settle here and to wander no more. In his anger he threw thirteen stones at the volcano which miraculously flew about in the air until they landed along the edges of the lake, most of them in coves where water plants with lovely flowers were abundant. Wherever one came to earth, an Indian village sprang up and flourished.

Today some thirteen villages, most of them named after the apostles, are around this most charming and romantic of Guatemala's many fine lakes. Some of the villages are of Cakchiquel tribal origin, others trace back to the Quichés or to the Tzutuhil tribe. Each town has its own fascinating customs and costumes, strikingly individualistic group folkways, and each, too, specializes in certain products. One raises extra-fine vegetables like artichokes and asparagus—and even strawberries. The men of San Lucas Tolimán, which means significantly "St. Luke where-reeds-are-gathered," are famed for the mats they weave from lake reeds. San Pablo features the making of rope and hammocks of dyed fibres. Other villages grow corn, collect green grasses around the lake for the feeding of domestic animals, or take special pride in building canoes out of the cedars and avocado trees that grow high up on the great volcano of San Pedro.

Specialization and an interdependence of villages are the rule throughout the Indian countryside of Guatemala. You find for instance that they go so far as to collect the fibrous maguey leaves literally at their door around a pottery-making village, sell the leaves to a far-off town which goes in for rope making, and finally buy the rope to tie their jars together with. Long established group habits are as influential as local conditions of demand and supply in deciding a village's occupation. Take San Andrés Semetabaj. The people of this Indian village established it near the shore of Lake Atitlán long long ago but have tenaciously continued to be the landlubbers they were before coming here. They never go swimming or fishing, and all their traveling is by land.

But to most of the Atitlán villagers, the lake is a great highway and crossroad. Over it they carry wares to market, in their own home-made canoes or in modern steam launches, some of which are helped along by sails. The beautiful waterway, over sixteen miles long, eleven and a half wide, is something like a center of exchange between the extraordinarily different regions of Guatemala—hot tropical lowlands, cool mountains, and rich balmy plateau. On the south-southwest side of Lake Atitlán are the gorgeous sweeping cones of three of Guatemala's highest inactive volcanoes, Atitlán, Tolimán, and San Pedro. Beyond them lies the low coastal plain along the Pacific. On the opposite side of the lake rise the heights from which you go northward to the hilly region of Chichicastenango. From those heights you look down almost five thousand feet to the deep blue lake, itself five thousand feet above sea level.

One day I went bathing at Tzanjuyu, the "nose of the mountain" that is such a beauty spot on the northern shore of the lake. Women from nearby Panajachel passed, dressed in their charming local costume whose blouse of brownish undyed cotton is elaborately embroidered with symbolic designs. Pleasure seekers from the capital and from foreign lands were setting out from the hotel on horseback rides. Others, friends of mine, were heading out into the open water in a canoe. I called, "Watch out for the *chocomil!*" and they nodded, recognizing how dangerous this high wind that springs up suddenly on quiet afternoons can be. The *chocomil* is the subject of many charming and dramatic Indian legends. One tells how this wind started.

Once there was a Tzutuhil prince named Utzil who decided to visit the capital of the rival Cakchiquel tribe. On his way he felt very thirsty. Fortunately he met a friendly crocodile who showed him a pool of dirty water which became clean and transparent as soon as the prince approached it.

Reaching the Cakchiquel city, Utzil was by no means welcomed as he had hoped. Instead he was taken for a spy and thrown in prison. There one night he dreamed that the god Chamalcan brought him a jar full of white liquid. As soon as Utzil drank this, the god promised him divine powers.

Next day the Cakchiquel king called on the prisoner, accompanied by his beautiful daughter, Princess Zacar. The two young people fell in love at first sight. Utzil pleaded for his liberty and Zacar urged her father to grant it. The king finally agreed but only on condition that Utzil should take part in the game called the Dance of the Mazorca or Corn Ear, an annual rite to implore the protection of the god Tohil, which was to take place next day. The prince gladly accepted.

Thirteen men took part in the contest. Twelve were Cakchiquels, the thirteenth was the Tzutuhil prince, Utzil. The twelve Cakchiquels all played the game together, keeping the ear of corn dancing high in the air, never falling to the ground, by shooting arrows rapidly at it. Meantime Prince Utzil stayed on the sidelines, hypnotized by the beauty of Zacar, who smiled back at him invitingly.

Utzil was at last roused from his trance by the clamoring onlookers, impatient to see him join in the game.

To impress the king and Zacar, Utzil asked if he might try all by himself to keep the ear of corn up in the air with his arrows. The king consented and ordered the Cakchiquel contestants to stand aside and to hand arrows to Utzil quickly when he should ask for them.

Now Chojinel, one of these twelve players, also loved Princess Zacar and had become furiously jealous on seeing how much attention she paid to Utzil. In the game, Utzil was triumphing brilliantly, and had struck almost all the grains from the ear of corn when he reached out to receive the arrows Chojinel was to have handed on to him. But instead, Chojinel spitefully tossed the arrows out of reach. Terribly angered by this affront, Utzil struck out with the last arrow remaining to him. It pierced his rival's chest, killing him instantly.

During the ensuing confusion, Utzil ran to Zacar and she joyfully slipped out of the city to the woods with him. After some time in hiding, they began walking toward Utzil's home, Atitlán, capital of the Tzutuhil tribe. But a wide river too swift to swim across barred their way. A canoe was seen at a distance by the river bank. Utzil hurried to get it, leaving his beloved behind. Returning, he found her dead, an arrow shot by an avenging Cakchiquel pursuer still piercing her heart. Dazed with grief, he carried her body with him as he journeyed onward. Arriving at his beloved Lake Atitlán, he climbed to the top of a high cliff. Holding Zacar's body close in his arms, he leapt into space and disappeared forever in the lapis lazuli water. Just then a strong passionate wind rose where the two lovers had fallen, and now, when the *chocomil* wind blows, the Indians tell one another that it is the spirits of Utzil and Zacar coming from their resting place to play madly over the lake.

Like the fiercely violent *chocomil,* tribal war has swept from time to time across this romantic lake, causing many deaths and sufferings. Today the villages descended from the Cakchiquel, Quiché, and Tzutuhil tribes all live in peace although very separate in their daily traditions, all preserving glorious memories of their ancestors who fought to dominate this earthly paradise before the coming of the Spaniards. Here on the Tzanjuyu promontory the main body of Tzutuhil warriors was decisively defeated by the *conquistadores,* who were ably assisted by that tribe's traditional native foe, the Cakchiquels.

In the century prior to the coming of the white man war after war had been fought by the three main Guatemalan tribes of Mayan culture and language. One war started when a few *tortillas* were stolen by a Quiché soldier from a poor Cakchiquel housewife. At other times love and romance led to long struggles between tribes. A quaint legend tells how an elopement started a long war.

For decades there had been tension between the Tzutuhils who controlled the shores of Lake Atitlán and the Quichés who had claims to half this rich area. Open fighting had been averted by the strenuous efforts of tribal statesmen, so the nobles of the two tribes were still able to visit one another peacefully.

The king of the Tzutuhils, young Zutujilepop, was related to King Balam-Acam of the rival Quiché tribe and from time to time paid visits to the Quiché court, accompanied by his close friend, Prince Yloacab. In the course of such visits the two young men fell in love. Zutujilepop and

King Balam-Acam's pretty daughter, Ixcunsocil, came to love one another deeply, while the Quiché king's niece, Exlixpua, and Prince Yloacab similarly became passionately attached.

After an absence the two Tzutuhil nobles went to the Quiché court only to learn that King Balam-Acam, ignorant of the romance budding between his guests and his daughter and niece, was preparing to marry the two girls to princes of the Mames tribe. The bans had been announced and the situation seemed so desperate that the four lovers determined to elope. For their escape they chose a stormy night. The two young suitors brought ladders by which they got into the garden of the royal palace where the girls awaited them. Covered by darkness and the noise of thunder, they got away safely, the men carrying their future brides in their arms.

There was great commotion next morning when attendants found the princesses missing from the soft mats which served them as beds. Nobody dared tell the king but he noticed their disappearance at the noonday meal. In a rage he questioned the guards who admitted having deserted their posts around the palace garden because of the rain that fell in the night. But no one had seen the princesses leave and the king found no clue to their whereabouts. With true indignation he heard that the girls had taken their jewels with them, indicating that their departure was premeditated and permanent, and not some casual childish escapade.

The Quiché king made sacrifices to the gods in hopes of finding the girls through divine intercession. He sent out spies over the country far and wide. At last he learned that they both were in Atitlán, enjoying their honeymoon near the beautiful lake. The fury of Balam-Acam was greater than ever for he now felt that the Tzutuhil princes had betrayed his faith in them and his hospitality.

A mighty army of Quichés was organized. Balam-Acam was at their head, in his finest feather-adorned raiment, loaded with jewels, riding in a resplendent litter so as to impress and humiliate the enemy. He took his three most valuable crowns along with him. But by the time the great attack was under way, King Zutujilepop of the Tzutuhils had built strong fortifications which effectively protected his kingdom and his loving consort. The war went on and on, lasting many more years than the struggle over Helen of Troy. The four lovers died in hearty old age, but their heirs fought on. Ten successive Quiché kings had reigned after Balam-Acam before the war ended at last with the Tzutuhils paying a fine to the Quichés, admitting thereby that their prince should not have let himself be swayed more by love than by his duty as a guest.

The ways of courtship and marriage are many among Guatemala Indians in recent centuries as also in those ancient times of tribal power. In some villages in the recent past, the suitor came and worked for his prospective father-in-law, courting his fiancée in her home meantime. If the girl's family broke off the engagement, the girl's father repaid the young man by working for him.

The wife has always held a position in the Indian household inferior to that of her husband, but she has usually been devotedly loved and treasured by him. In some places it has been customary, following the old Mayan tradition, for an ailing Indian to choose a successor in case he should die. As head of the household he called upon a friend to visit his bedside where the marriage of the widow-to-be was planned. Or, if it seemed quite sure that the husband had little time to live, the dying man himself performed the marriage of his wife to a healthy man.

Today, as before the arrival of Europeans, the care of the sick in out-of-the-way Indian villages is in the hands of *brujos,* although modern medicines and practices are more and more called upon. Sometimes the *brujo* uses magic only. When simple diseases are recognized, the *brujo* prescribes herbs often chosen because their shape or taste has some association with the ailment. The cure given for snake bite is a long slender plant that resembles a snake. An herb used to alleviate rheumatism has joints that look like swollen finger joints. A tea for insomnia is made of a flower whose petals close together when the sun sets.

In general the Guatemala Indians are a sturdy folk and seldom call for medical treatment, magical or scientific. Childbirth seems an easy thing for the Indian women who commonly go about their usual tasks a few hours after giving birth. When a mother does not feel strong enough to get up and about soon after a child is born, the family is likely to become alarmed and to call a *brujo.* He gets a black hen and opens its breast with a sharp knife over the ailing woman's head so that the blood will drop down and give her vitality.

The Indian baby usually lives on its own mother's milk until about three years old, after which it begins sharing in adult life, eating the cornmeal *tortillas* and black beans of the grownups and helping to some extent in the household duties. In the home, the baby sleeps in a crude cradle swinging from the rafters by two cords. Wherever the mother goes, working in the fields, washing clothing beside a stream, the baby is always there, wrapped close against her back in a lovely hand-woven shawl.

Indians are devoted to their children who have a happy outdoor time, with little schooling of the modern kind except in larger towns. They share in village festivities as well as in their parents' work, are rarely punished or made to do jobs injurious to them. Small boys take pride in showing their strength, eagerly bearing as heavy a load as the father will allow—anything to prove that they are real men. Fathers teach their little sons how to fish, hunt, and plant crops. Daughters learn from their mothers to spin, weave and cook, trying to do daily tasks with skill.

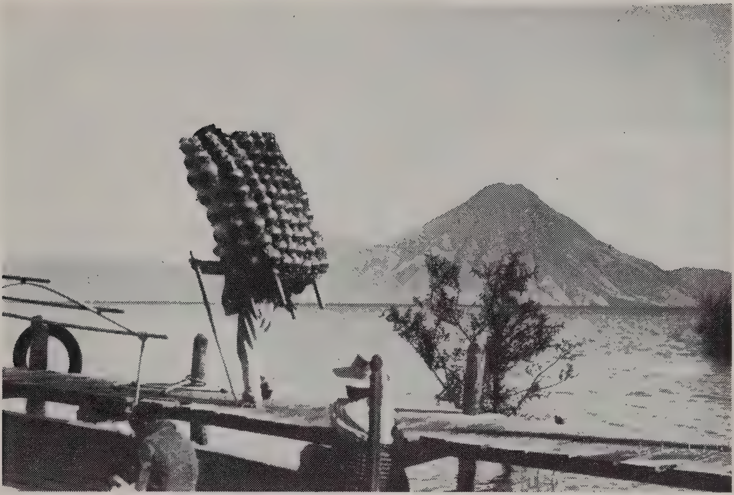
A curious ancient custom still followed in some villages consists in sprinkling some grains of corn with the blood of a baby boy's umbilical cord the moment after his birth. The grains are carefully stored away until the boy is old enough to cultivate his own corn field. Then the grain is reverently planted to assure the youth good luck and his field good crops. "Thus," they say, "he will eat his own blood as he eats his own corn."

One reason the simple villagers and farmers of Guatemala are so strong is that most parts of the country have such a healthy climate, comparable to Italy and California. Only the lowlands along the Pacific and Atlantic coasts are enervatingly hot and truly tropical. Most of Guatemala's population lives on the 5,000-foot plateau, in mountains like those around Chichicastenango, or in the environs of high-set lakes like Atitlán. In all such regions the climate is commonly sunny, warm yet brisk, an eternal spring.

A diet of boiled vegetables, fruits, *tortillas,* and black beans which they eat with lots of very hot pepper, and an outdoor life of hard physical work, all contribute to good health. Their eyesight is most extraordinary, and so are their teeth, for though they never brush them, they do not have cavities at all. They reach old age without a single white hair. An Indian is always careful to take along a *zuyacal,* a flat umbrella made of strips of palm leaves so tightly interlaced that it is waterproof, or a closely woven *zarape,* when he goes far from home, to protect himself against rain and chills.

Although their homes are frequently dirty, the natives keep their bodies clean. In fact, when the people of austere old Europe first came to this balmy paradise, they were worried by the eager daily bathing of the Indians, fearing that there was something obscene or impious about it. San Pedro la Laguna, which lies between the great San Pedro volcano and Lake Atitlán, is one of the many Guatemala villages noted for their steam baths called *tamascales.* A special room of adobe is built linked by a wide opening to an oven. Rocks are heated in the oven and then water is poured over them, creating a dense steam. When the housewife sees her husband arriving from his day's work she hurriedly arranges all this and soon the man is enjoying a relaxing steam bath.

Drinking is generally associated with religious festivities, or with parties connected with funerals and weddings. Like other Europeans who colonized the new world, the Spaniards found it very profitable to sell the natives their refined brandy, so much headier than the primitive indigenous brews made of fermented fruits. Finding that the practice of drinking was spreading among their people to an injurious degree, some village *caciques* bought from the con-



An Indian carrying pottery in his *cacaxtle* crosses a small bridge.

Lago de Atitlán

Beautiful Lake Atitlan.

Indian women weaving on primitive looms.

Scene at an Indian market.

querors, four hundred years ago, the privilege of banning all intoxicants from their towns.

In some of these remote villages, still under prohibition, the Indians keep their traditional custom of selecting from among themselves a chief, known as their *cacique*. Although he has no real legal power, as he is under control of the civil and military government of Guatemala, his moral influence is as strong as was that of the *caciques* before the Conquest, and the inhabitants obey him more willingly than they would any white man. The authorities know this and keep on good terms with him, conceding many privileges.

A touching story is told of such a village which has remained dry for centuries. According to its old law, an inhabitant can drink all he wishes elsewhere, but if found drunk inside the village the offender is punished with fifty strokes of a whip which must be applied by the *cacique* personally.

Not so long ago, this village was dominated by a very upright young Indian *cacique*. So observant of all the old laws was he that when one of his dearest friends came home drunk, the young man punished him publicly, to the consternation of many easy-going citizens. The chastised youth was deeply resentful and sought vengeance for the whipping he had received. His chance came when the *cacique's* aged mother went to a feast in a neighboring "wet" village, accompanied by this friend. He encouraged her to drink more and more during the evening and night. When they got home the next morning, the old lady was boisterous and sang and danced as she went along. Her son was deeply troubled. How, he wondered, could he reconcile his devotion to his mother and his duty as *cacique*? Finally he had the news proclaimed that his mother would receive the usual punishment of drunkenness in the town's plaza the following market day.

When the day came, greater crowds than usual gathered, curious to see what the *cacique,* noted for his loving and respectful treatment of his mother, would do. At the appointed time, the old woman, humbled and with downcast eyes, was brought before him. The whip used for punishing wrongdoers was handed him and the crowd drew back to form a wide circle around the tall young man and the timid little woman who stood trembling before him.

But instead of striking her, he handed the whip to her, pulled off his shirt, and commanded his mother to strike him fifty times.

"No! Never!" she cried, and the crowd joined in her protest. A group of elders went up to the young Indian and begged him to pardon his mother, assuring him that the town wished it so. This he firmly refused to do and repeated his command to his mother.

"I was the guilty one," she sobbed. "Why should you suffer in my place?"

"I was a son before I became a *cacique,*" he answered. "It is my duty as your son to take on myself your guilt and punishment."

So, with a trembling hand, the old lady dealt the fifty strokes of the whip. Then the young man proudly addressed his silent people. "I have fulfilled my duty as *cacique.* The law has been respected and carried out."

The survival of such strong wholesome Indian traditions as those connected with local government, the high importance they give their ancestral designs, the folk habits of cleanliness and hard work, the persisting influence of pagan *brujos*—all help explain why marvelous hand-made costumes and textile arts continue to be produced in Guatemala. For strikingly beautiful dress is no superficial thing, no skin-deep amusement among our Indians. Their weavings and embroideries are on the contrary a determined forceful expression of the personality and self-confident pride of the villages.

Each Guatemalan village has its particular costume, and its own dialect, and so the costumes and other weavings of the country would fill a large album of colored pictures. The variety of their themes and color schemes testifies to an amazingly rich art achievement, as satisfying and beyond comparison as the everchanging sunset back of the volcanoes, seen from across Lake Atitlán.

Costumes in use in the villages around Lake Atitlán alone, show a greater variety than those of whole nations elsewhere. Every village is different. At San Pedro, the men attract more attention than the women, their cuffs and trousers richly embroidered with animals and flowers. A few miles away along the same shore of the lake, at Santiago Atitlán, it is the women who wear the more lovely array. Their dress is red and white. Their hair is done up even on workdays in one of the most flattering arrangements ever devised to bring out the beauty of a woman's face. In this unique headdress long black hair is braided in with a narrow band of cloth many yards long. The band is red except for a yard on each end which is woven into green, purple, red and orange motifs. Hair and band are wound round and round the head until a great halo is formed. A smiling face looking up at you from the shore of the blue lake with this bright aureole around it is really a charming vision. And the young women here are so gay and pretty in themselves that even without such a decorative background their faces would linger in your memory. It is no surprise that the thatched huts of such nice people are surrounded with even gayer flowers and flowering vines than you usually see in Guatemalan villages.

The costumes of men are generally very different in design and color patterns from those of the women in the same village. The men of San Lucas Tolimán, on the slope of one of the three great volcanoes overlooking Lake Atitlán, wear white shirts and white knee-length trousers with wide purple and red stripes. Their sash is red and their jacket is blue. The women of the same town wear a white *huipil* or blouse across which is a wide bold band of brightly colored geometric designs, with tiny spots of color in abstract motifs scattered over the white areas of the blouse. These women's skirts are blue and green and their sashes are red like those of the men. The women of San Lucas Tolimán buy imported taffeta ribbons for their hair, but somehow such innovations do not mar the charm of the ancient costume.

Similarly, the custom of wearing hats was introduced, they say, by the Spanish, but this has not made the costuming of Indian men less attractive. No matter how ordinary a straw hat looks in the shop, by the time an Indian has arranged it to suit the fancy of his own village it has gained a personality all its own. In San Jorge la Laguna, which lies in a deep gorge north of Lake Atitlán, the men wind a thick red *tzute* or sash round their hats. In Sololá the men wear a felt hat thickly coated with dark varnish so that it is heavy and solid as a kettle. Around the crown of this Sololá hat a wide, elaborately decorated strip of cloth is attached. In Todos Santos, a wide-rimmed straw hat is set cockily above a gaily colored *tzute* which is tied round the head with a huge bow on one side. In still other towns, men's hats are coated with bee's wax, and there are ceremonial hats made of palm leaves which have been dyed black.

The Guatemalan villagers preserve their ancient ways not only in the cut and colors of their textiles but in the techniques of making them. Many kinds of hand and foot looms are used. In isolated places, dyes still come from plants and locally mined minerals. One dye no longer in use but highly prized in the old days was a purple derived from a mollusk found on the shores of the Pacific. It was very similar to the royal purple produced by a mollusk which the Phoenicians sought so eagerly thousands of years ago along the shores of the Mediterranean.

In some larger Indian towns, symbols decorating a costume indicate not only the place the wearer comes from but his age and importance. The various types of *brujos* have their own styles in some areas. Also men of superior position are singled out by certain designs on their clothing. In Chichicastenango, boys before the age of puberty, adolescents still under the guidance of their fathers, and men who have become heads of households, are recognized by symbols indicative of these facts embroidered on their trousers. Unmarried girls in many towns wear their skirts shorter than married women, while older matrons wear theirs longer.

Among the most interesting of common decorative symbols seen in Guatemalan costumes is a double-headed eagle. This is generally thought to have been copied from the coat-of-arms of the Hapsburg kings as seen on coins of the Spanish conquerors. But there are students of Indian lore who contend that it was sacred here long before the arrival of the white man and represents the *guacamaya,* a bird emblematic of nobility. Still others consider it a symbol of the sun which "descended glowing in all the colors of life and lit the sacred Mayan fire at the ceremony celebrating the summer solstice."

Even colors have their own significance, at least to the pagan wise man. In ancient Mayan times yellow was associated with corn, hence symbolized food. But on the other hand yellow also was a symbol for mourning, and widows dyed their bodies that color. Blue among the ancient Indians signified sacrifice, and green was the royal color because remindful of the quetzal bird's plumes worn by kings only. Red has a very high mystic value, at least in Chichicastenango. To the old Maya, it represented blood, and also was emblematic of the East, just as white was the color of the North, yellow of the South and black of the West. Black also was symbolic of weapons, because the war clubs were made of bits of black obsidian embedded in a piece of wood.

To the humble weavers and spinners, most of whom are women, the magic meaning of colors and symbols is of little interest compared to that of blending design and color to reach a beautiful result. They have great pride in doing fine work. In the villages the maker of an object is recognized simply by the way it was done—even though the color schemes and designs are fixed by tradition, and she cannot always change things to suit herself. Step by step, the production of these treasures of simple people calls for the utmost in careful work and although they do it so enthusiastically, they must sometimes look back wistfully to the mythical times when life was easier, and when, so their legends declare, cotton grew naturally in all the colors of the rainbow.

4

WHITE MEN GALLOP INTO THE LAND

Zaculeu

One sunny afternoon, so the Indian legend was told to me, the Mames tribe gathered together in the *plaza* of charming highland Zaculeu, near the present-day city of Huehuetenango. The Indians were joyful and in their gayest holiday attire, for they were here to witness the wedding of sweet Princess Tajahuales and young Tenojote, most famous of their warriors and head of the Mames army.

The celebration started off with a tournament in honor of the god of crops. Then the king, father of the bride, officially announced the marriage. At the peak of the tall tower by the crowded *plaza,* the high priest burned incense and offered praises to the sun before the sacred fires. Young girls crowned with flowers, smiling shyly, danced around the tower to the music of many *chirimías,* fifes, and drums. Beside the stone altar of sacrifices, priests in ritualistic ornaments of jewels and feathers sang prayers to the god of lovers.

On the royal tribune, which was festively adorned with corn ears and blossoming branches, sat King Caibal-Balam and his family. The courtiers surrounding them paid compliments to the bride who was seated in front of her father, more radiant than ever. And, in the nearby tribune of honor was Tenojote who watched his future wife tenderly.

Close beside Princess Tajahuales was Xinacul, her dearest friend. She too, was young and pretty, but wise as an aged sorcerer in the omens of stars and winds and clouds. Xinacul saw how happy her princess was and smiled cheerfully back at her excited chatter of dreams and projects. But Xinacul's eyes soon began to watch anxiously the strangely shaped clouds that rolled by high overhead. Tajahuales noticed her silence and sensed Xinacul's anxiety as the unnatural clouds turned from pink to red and from red to black on reaching the peaks that closed in the valley.

"Do you see some evil presage, Xinacul?" the princess asked. "You watch the sky so keenly."

To calm her suspicions, Xinacul softly denied seeing anything ominous. Concealing her presentiments, she went on fanning her friend with the big fan of rare feathers soaked with aromatic essences, that perfumed the air all around them.

Reassured, Tajahuales again turned to smile at her beloved and pointed out to him the setting sun to remind him of the many afternoons they had walked together far from the city among the ancient trees to watch the sunset. By now Xinacul was no longer able to suppress her apprehension at the evil signs gathering in the sky, symbols indicating to her danger, blood, death, and horror. She pleaded with the princess, "Please, ask the king to go on at once with your marriage."

The throngs below and all the court knelt as King Caibal-Balam, aided by the high priest, began the final ceremony. Drums and trumpets echoed to the hills announcing that the royal cortège was on its way to the sacred fountain. There, the two lovers wet the tips of their fingers in the divine water as they swore eternal fidelity. The high priest went to the stone of sacrifices and immolated two little fawns with prayers for the welfare of the couple who were now one. At the same moment as the sacrifice, a hundred white-dressed virgins freed a hundred white doves to scatter through the world the happy news of the wedding.

Tenojote then stood before the sacred fire and was introduced to the people as husband of Princess Tajahuales, while the throngs loudly sang joyful tunes and began merrymaking. Princess Tzite, eldest sister of the bride, performed dances specially designed for such occasions, after which the king and the court retired to the palace, leaving Tenojote alone to escort his wife to the lovely home he had prepared for her.

Suddenly strange harsh noises like thunder were heard, and at a distance big weird demons appeared with the heads and arms of men but with the four legs of animals. Their faces and hands were white, their heavy legs black or red. As they approached a terrible noise and smoke came from them, killing all who stood in their way. Quickly they reached the gate of the city. The sentinels fled in panic to the strong pyramid-shaped fortresses. The merrymakers ran in confusion here and there.

Proud King Caibal-Balam, who had returned to the *plaza,* was alone calm. He cried above the din, "War! War!" which was the Mames tribal rallying call. His soldiers obeyed and rushed to take up their weapons. Tenojote tenderly kissed his young bride and hurried to head the Mames army opposing the advancing demons.

Orders were given for the women and children to hide in their homes. The young princess had fainted when Tenojote left her and was carried by her attendants to her father's palace. Thousands of Indian soldiers perished under the magic fire that was thrown by the enemy, while the arrows and stone-tipped lances of the defenders did no damage to those curious assailants who seemed made of metal. The struggle went on fiercely as the sun disappeared and night began to fall.

From the high rock where he stood directing his men, Tenojote saw Tajahuales run into the thick of the fighting calling for him in anguish. He dashed down to her rescue, reaching her after three of the fierce hairy-chinned newcomers had grasped her. Tenojote killed one with his lance but the other two wounded him with long thin weapons that looked as if made of silver. When he fell, they slashed at him.

Tajahuales screamed and scratched and bit the two assailants, trying to prevent their striking Tenojote, but when she saw that he was dead, she fainted again. Hours later she woke in the camp of the newcomers, bruised and violated. Crawling from the camp she found Tenojote's body lying where it fell. Some of his loyal companions had braved the enemy to come and bury him. She stood by watching and weeping so bitterly that a small pool was formed by her tears. As they began piling the earth on him, she fell dead over his body and the soil was heaped high over the two lovers, joining them forever. The Indians say that a tree called *tenojote* soon grew over the grave and that nearby a spring began to flow, whose waters never dry because they are caused by the unending tears of the young bride. They also say that on certain nights melancholy laments come from the little spring.

The Spanish invaders burned the city after they subdued the brave Mames tribe but the mighty pyramidal forts of Zaculeu are still to be seen near the present city of Huehuetenango.

To many Indians of Guatemala, the arrival of the Spanish horsemen of the Conquest was full of the surprise, awe, and horror described in the legend of Princess Tajahuales. In the eyes of those early American worshippers of complex deities, who had never seen a horse before, the strange white men on their battle-trained steeds, with coats of mail and helmets that flint could not pierce, with powerful crossbows and demoniacal firearms spouting fiery missiles, were far indeed above a human enemy. Even in rocky mountains and forests where heavy armor and horses were ineffective in physical combat, the intruders struck the natives with hate and terror. Their arms and horses and most of all their psychological weapon—their fanatical faith in Christ and the Virgin Mary, made the Spaniards invincible.

Spaniards had conquered the heart of the Aztec empire in 1519 and were busily expanding in search of gold and treasure. It was an age of impatience and grandiose vision. You might think the handful of adventurers who had endured such great perils and suffering would now have settled down in the rich and pleasant center which is now Mexico City. Instead the desire for more and more gold, for vaster possessions and glorious titles led them on and on.

Significantly, the leading conqueror of Mexico, Hernan Cortés, the greatest of the conquerors of Peru, Francisco

Pizarro, the North American explorer, de Soto, and the winner of Guatemala, Pedro de Alvarado, all came from Estremadura, Spain's most uncultured, most barren, most fiercely pious region. Conquerors like these men had left little behind them; nostalgia did not burden their dreams or days. They were fighters, without habits of luxury, with small knowledge of the protocol of courts. They were innocent of academic notions of what could and what could not be humanly achieved. In short, they were ideal pathfinders into the unknown.

Cortés heard in Mexico that lands to the south were fabulously rich in gold. If men loyal to him did not get these treasures, his Spanish rivals in the Caribbean islands would. Besides, his dear friend Pedro de Alvarado, born as he himself was in Badajoz, and in the same year, had shown exceptional courage and skill in military tactics during battles against the Aztecs. He was dangerously ambitious and would best be appeased before he got out of hand. Cortés was brooding on how to accomplish this when an ambassador arrived representing the Cakchiquels, one of the mightiest tribes in that rich land to the south. The Cakchiquels had heard of the invincible white men who had subdued Montezuma. Believing they had superhuman powers, the ambassador proposed an alliance and requested help against the Quichés, the mortal enemies of the Cakchiquels. Cortés gladly accepted and, sure of success now that he was strengthened by these new allies, he decided to send an expedition under Alvarado into unexplored Central America.

As usual among those robust fighters, the expeditionary force was composed not of what was needed for so distant and dangerous a venture but of what could be conveniently spared. In the party were three hundred Spanish infantrymen, some armed with muskets, the others with crossbows; one hundred and thirty-five horsemen; forty horses in reserve; four small cannon commanded by an artilleryman; and three hundred Tlaxcala and other Mexican Indians armed with primitive weapons but well guarded from enemy arrows by coats of cotton quilting. Two Catholic priests accompanied this force, which set out late in 1523, marching toward the southern Pacific coast frontier of Mexico.

It was known that the tribes they hoped to conquer were important and had great cities. Even today, it is not clear how strong the Guatemala natives were, how great their armies or how populous their peoples. Some estimate that as many as fifteen millions lived then in this rich land, others believe less. The *conquistadores* described the cities they captured as beautiful and mighty, and the armies they routed as numbering up to 30,000 men.

Alvarado marched through Soconusco and Zapotitlan near the Pacific and on in the direction of present-day Quetzaltenango, then called Xelajú. Guatemala tribesmen fought bitterly against the advancing white men. The Spaniards were unable to use their horses to full advantage because of the thickly growing cacao plantations of the Indians in the Pacific lowlands, and the forests and difficult mountains in which many ambushes were met and overcome. Alvarado was struck in the leg by an arrow during an ambush and limped from the wound the rest of his life.

At one high narrow pass a strange pagan sacrifice attempted to bar their way, and struck terror to the hearts of many of the recently converted Indian allies. There in the path lay two bodies, one of a fat sorceress, the other of a dog of the kind that does not bark and was bred by the natives for food. In another mountain encounter, fighting was so ferocious and stubborn that blood formed into a stream that leaped in cascades down the rocky slope. The Spanish were heartened in battle by the statue of the Virgin del Socorro which their chaplain, Juan Godinez, and his assistant Juan Diaz, bore confidently along.

After climbing from Pacific lowlands and crossing high mountains, the invaders reached lands ruled by the strongest of all Guatemalan tribes, the Quichés. Their domain was so vast that in order to govern it properly they had divided it and had four kings ruling at the same time, all from the royal family and under the direction of a leading king. Until a short time before, the main Quiché king had been Kicab-Tanub. But court soothsayers had informed him that strange newcomers with white faces would crush his people and he had died of grief at this prophecy. His successor was his son, Tecum-Uman, a courageous warrior considered unconquerable because his *nahual* or spiritual guardian was the sacred quetzal bird.

As the Spaniards approached the important center of Xelajú a series of battles was fought. The Spanish horsemen found themselves again and again at a disadvantage in the hills and held when possible to the plains. Often they pretended to be in flight, a ruse that led the enemy to run after them. When favorably flat ground was reached, the horsemen whirled about and slaughtered the pursuers.

The mightiest Indian opposition of all faced the Spaniards at Pahajá with brave king Tecum-Uman, chief military leader of the Quiché tribe, at its head. Alvarado estimated his foe in the ensuing battle as numbering thirty thousand.

Tecum-Uman advanced upon the seemingly demon strangers armed not only with aboriginal weapons of mortals but with all the magic that his religion could summon. He rode in a royal litter adorned with the awesome quetzal plumes, preceded by trumpets, drums and fifes proudly playing music heartening to his troops. Though the Spanish cavalry drove back some formations of Quiché Indians, the infantry and the four cannon were being worsted by an overwhelming and confident force when Alvarado saw at a distance the glittering litter bearing Tecum-Uman. The Spanish leader had heard that the green quetzal plumes denoted a king in this land and rushed boldly forward, calling to his cavalry to follow. A hand-to-hand struggle ensued between the two warrior chieftains. It is said that for a time Alvarado was losing. A quetzal, which some Spanish chroniclers were to describe as a green eagle, so fierce was it, flew at him again and again, striking at his eyes with its beak. He turned his attention from his human adversary to slash at and kill the magic bird. At that moment Tecum-Uman killed Alvarado's horse with his spear. Their hand to hand struggle went on but at last the Indian king fell dead. On seeing this, the Quiché army dispersed in panic, completely demoralized.

In memory of the sacred quetzal bird which had fought so defiantly for the Quiché king, the nearby city of Xelajú was renamed Quetzaltenango or Place of the Quetzal.

Soon after that great battle, Alvarado received word that Utatlán, the Quiché capital, was ready to submit to him in peace. He marched his force there. As he galloped through the city, no women or children were to be seen. Shrewd soldier that he was, Alvarado thereupon suspected treachery. Giving no sign of his doubts, he courteously told his hosts that the strange godly beasts the Spaniards rode required for their welfare the space of the open fields which lay on the other side of the capital. He then ordered his force to pass through Utatlán to the plain beyond.

Spies brought Alvarado news that evening confirming his suspicions. The kings, Oxib-Queb and Beleheb-Tzy, confident of victory, had remained in Utatlán preparing a triumphal reception for Tecum-Uman. Grieved by the disastrous rout of the army and the death of their beloved Tecum-Uman they had planned a dreadful revenge. They had sent all the city's women and children into the hills and massed troops in and near the capital. According to the Quiché scheme, the Spaniards were to have slept in the closely built city, the thatches of its crowded huts were to have been set on fire and the expeditionary force burned alive or wiped out in the ensuing confusion.

Alvarado gave no indication of anger. Thinking he did not know of their plot, the Quiché kings and their noble followers visited him on the plain next day and tried to persuade him to return to Utatlán. But Alvarado, informed by his spies of their approach, prepared a frightful retaliation. They all were tied to the posts where the horses had been picketed the night before. Dead leaves and branches that had been gathered were piled around and they were burned alive. Then two youths, the son of Tecum-Uman and the son of Beleheb-Tzy, burned that day, were named puppet rulers of their people. A few days later Alvarado marched on into the land of the Cakchiquel tribe after burning Utatlán. It was then that many survivors from the Quiché capital fled to the wild country around present-day Chichicastenango.

So as to test the intentions of the Cakchiquels, Alvarado had previously asked their aid when he attacked the Quichés. Since the two tribes were hereditary foes, this request had been gladly responded to and four thousand Cakchiquels shared as allies of the Spaniards in the destruction of the Quiché army and their capital. As an ally, Alvarado was joyously welcomed with every expression of friendship at the Cakchiquel capital of Iximché, also called Tecpán-Quautemalan. Incidentally, it is believed that from the latter title the present name of Guatemala was derived.

Alvarado always keenly appreciated the usefulness of instigating one enemy against the other. He skillfully encouraged each tribe to hope for advantages from loyalty to him until it become isolated, weak enough for crushing in its turn. So he eagerly complied with the demand of the two Cakchiquel kings, Belche-Qat and Cahi-Imox for aid against the Tzutuhils, the third most powerful tribe in Guatemala. Together with his Cakchiquel allies, he marched against the Tzutuhil stronghold on Lake Atitlán, won a decisive victory over that people, gained their capitulation and the voluntary submission of other tribes in the Atitlán region.

The Cakchiquels felt doubly secure in their alliance with Alvarado when he announced that he would establish the capital of the country at Iximché. But their faith in him was soon shattered by his exactions and insults. During the festivities given at Iximché in his honor, he had noticed Xuchil, the beautiful young wife of one of the city's richest princes. The innocent princess was lured to Alvarado's palace and kept there as his concubine. Her husband, aware of Alvarado's greed for gold and jewels, brought him a treasure trove in the hope of thus gaining his wife's freedom. Alvarado took the gifts, then turned on the young prince with his horse whip and slashed him furiously, after which he unleashed his dogs who nearly tore the man to pieces. So large and fierce were the dogs of the *conquistadores* that ordinances were later made under pressure of the Catholic clergy to prevent their being allowed loose to injure the natives.

The popularity of the Spaniards among the Cakchiquels fell to the vanishing point after a number of such instances of abuse and bad faith. Noting their growing resentment, and knowing that their alliance with him had alienated them from the other tribes, Alvarado decided the time had come to crush their proud leaders. In apparent friendship he invited their kings to visit him. Instead of the dignified reception expected, they were greeted by wild anger, threats, and grave and entirely false accusations—a method Hitler was to use so effectively in gaining his ends centuries later. Alvarado charged the kings with hiding treasure and lying, and demanded huge quantities of gold and silver, giving the kings three days to produce them. The trembling monarchs returned at the time ordered with all the precious metal asked of them. Alvarado was not pleased but, again like Hitler, redoubled his accusations. He went so far as to go up to the kings, and tear the jewels from their ears, ripping open the earlobes. The bleeding and outraged royal Indians withdrew without a word but quickly called together their main priests and the nobility. The leadership concluded that they would meet the fate of the Quiché kings if they tried to get on any longer with such an unprincipled tyrant as Alvarado. So they, their families and all the residents slipped from the city at night, and fled into isolated hill country from which they successfully harassed the Spaniards.

Previous to this incident Alvarado had officially established Iximché as the first capital of Guatemala on Saint James's Day, July 25, 1524. For that reason and because Saint James is the patron saint of Spain, they called the capital Santiago (St. James) de Guatemala. Alvarado expressed the wish that this should always be the name of the capital of the country he had conquered, wherever it should be located. Hence the name was also borne by the second center of Spanish rule now known as Ciudad Vieja, and by the third which is at present la Antigua.

In revenge for the flight of its inhabitants, Alvarado later burned Iximché and moved first to Xepau and then to Olimtepeque, near by, where the Spaniards continued exploiting the lands and Indians within the conquered areas. Prisoners of war were branded and enslaved, many to serve in the gold and other mines which were to produce great wealth. Since Alvarado himself was often away subduing smaller Indian tribes, many conflicts for leadership arose. Many too were the epidemics of smallpox that wiped out whole native villages, and many the uprisings among the Indians, driven to despair by the demands made upon them. One of the greatest of these rebellions was led by Sinacam and Sequechul in 1526. The Conquest was by no means completed. Although many of the Spanish soldiers were weary of fighting, expeditions were undertaken to vanquish outlying tribes. With time, tribe after tribe was brought by force to serve Spanish masters, or submitted peacefully to the unarmed Catholic misionaries. The tragic legend of Princess Tajahuales tells of the attack made in 1525 on Zaculeu, capital of the Mames tribe, for the purpose of subduing this people. This expedition was led by Gonzalo, one of the four brothers who with other relatives had followed the great Pedro de Alvarado in his adventures ever since they came in 1510 to Cuba.

On some of the missions of conquest, Fray Bartolomé de Olmedo went along to influence the fierce warriors of his own people toward justice and kindliness, and to convert the conquered. With him on such trips went a statue of Our Lady *de las Mercedes* which became famous through the years. Conquered Indians, who came to the friar to be indoctrinated in the victory-bringing faith, told him that wherever the statue of this Virgin had appeared in battle, a fine shower of sand fell, blinding them so they could no longer attack the Spaniards. The statue was preserved as a miraculous relic and an early chronicler wrote of it: "To remind men that they owed their victories to Her, an Indian arrow can be seen piercing Her throat. Blood runs from it which remains so fresh and bright through the years that paint cannot cover or hide it. Sometimes the statue is very dark, at others light, or a bright red, so that no artist has been able to give in a picture a true idea of its appearance."

At the same time as Pedro de Alvarado's cruel and glorious adventures in conquering the main tribes of the high plateau of Guatemala, Hernan Cortés was on an expedition further to the east, passing by way of Guatemala lowlands to take over Honduras from his disloyal lieutenant, Cristobal de Olid. The latter had been executed meanwhile by another of the great leader's captains but news had not reached Nueva España in time to forestall Cortés' long march.

Cortés took with him a hundred and fifty Spanish soldiers of whom a hundred were on horseback, and three thousand Mexican Indians. Among these were the last of the Aztec emperors, Guatemozin, and the king of Tacuba. Cortés had them with him ostensibly to help in his undertaking but actually for fear that they might rebel in his absence.

The march from Nueva España, as Mexico was then called, southward into the vast Peten wilderness of Guatemala, which even today defies civilization, was started in October, 1524. The expedition found neither roads nor villages able to supply it with food. Guides deserted. Terrible sufferings were experienced struggling through deep marshes and thick jungles. Many died of starvation and disease. Often the only food was of roots and fruits. When the survivors reached the Usumacinta, our largest river, they clamored to turn homeward and balked at swimming its wide deep waters. But Cortés forced them to build a pontoon bridge and by it they crossed.

Through these dangers Cortés was accompanied by a remarkable Indian girl known as *la Malinche,* although Cortés called her Doña Marina. She bore him a son, Don Martin Cortés. *La Malinche* had come originally from this region and was invaluable to Cortés as interpreter and ambassador among the tribes met with. Thanks to her, the party was cordially received and fed in the town of Aculán. During their rest in that place, spies told Cortés that the heir to the Aztec throne and the king of Tacuba were plotting to murder him, so Cortés had them killed. Bernal Diaz del Castillo, the greatest chronicler of these times, who was with Cortés, reported that the grim and summary execution of the suspects by Cortés was unjust, as he believed they were innocent.

Purged with innocent blood, and rested and refreshed, the Cortés army marched forward toward the lake of Itza or Peten, second largest in Guatemala. On a lovely island in the lake, the Itza tribe had their capital called Tayasal. Again *la Malinche* showed her skill as mediator and gained for Cortés a cordial welcome.

While relaxing at beautiful Lake Itza in Peten, which is today important as the center of Guatemala's export of chicle, Cortés found that one of his favorite horses was lame. He thought he would return the same way to Mexico, not realizing that he was to find a ship to take him away from Honduras. So he asked the local Indians, as he said goodbye, to care for the horse until his return. They were told to feed it with grass and corn.

Never having seen horses before, the Itza people thought them creatures akin to the gods and certainly worthy of much better food than grass and corn. So they brought to the horse of Cortés the same offerings they sacrificed to their greatest gods: flowers, beautiful birds, all the rare things they regarded most highly. Naturally the horse could not eat them and died of starvation.

To continue their worship of the horse, they made a stone image of life size and as close to the animal's appearance as their craftsmen could make it. The statue was installed in its own temple and worshipped for many years. Long after, some Spanish missionaries visited the town. Indignant at the devotion being paid a horse, they had the statue thrown into the lake where it lay visible in the clear water until a few years ago.

From Tayasal, Cortés marched on southward, always with his loving and wise Indian interpreter, *la Malinche.* They came to a village which she recognized as her birthplace. Recollecting happy childhood moments and forgetting past misfortunes, she ran about joyfully, seeking old faces that rose from her early memories as from a common grave.

A drunken old woman she came upon in the village *la Malinche* recognized as her own mother. The beautiful girl wept with joy. To the disreputable woman she gave many fine and costly jewels, gifts from Cortés in his moments of deepest sentiment. Cortés knew that as a child, *la Malinche* had been sold into slavery by this hag, who had felt freer without her child to follow her career of debauchery. When he saw his best presents to his beloved handed so casually to the author of her misfortunes, he was furious. In spite of *la Malinche's* protestations of devotion to him, he broke off from her, giving her to a knight among his friends, Don Juan Xaramillo, as a slave to do with as he pleased. If she could give his presents, he could make a gift of her, he apparently wished her to realize. But the Spanish knight esteemed *la Malinche's* noble qualities and made her his wife by all the rites of the Catholic religion to which she had been converted.

5

LA SIN VENTURA

Ciudad Vieja

From Peten, Cortés passed on through Guatemala's eastern lowlands and into present-day Honduras, leaving the whole territory between Mexico and South America to his faithful, constantly active, conniving, seductive, brutal, insatiable lieutenant, conquistador Pedro de Alvarado.

The story of Guatemala in the generation following its conquest was as closely tied up with Alvarado and a small group of his brothers and other relatives as the initial wars against the dominant tribes had been.

When good-looking and elegant Pedro de Alvarado first came to the New World, reaching Cuba in 1510, he was only twenty-five years old but was morally and militarily strengthened by a loyal following: four younger brothers and some relations bearing the name of Alvarado. All pulled together. His brothers Gonzalo and Jorge were to be particularly connected with developments in Guatemala.

From Cuba this veritable clan went with Cortés on the bold invasion of Mexico. Pedro rapidly showed himself a brilliant military leader, so superior in forcefulness to his brothers that henceforth they became his permanent assistants, fought under his command in the war against the Aztecs and during the invasion of Guatemala.

Typical of the epoch, each *conquistador,* including Alvarado, had a harder time defending his rank and treasure from rival Spaniards than in capturing land and gold from the Indians. Following the founding of the makeshift Spanish capital at the Cakchiquel center of Iximché, and until his death, Don Pedro was almost constantly on the move. But he was always able to count on some family member to defend his interests in his long absences from Guatemala. The stakes were fabulous and the envious many. King Charles of Spain, who was also emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, and the universally ramified Catholic Church, were powers too mighty to defy and their vast overall spiritual and political strategy often conflicted with the on-the-spot, down-to-earth interest of such *conquistadores* as Alvarado. Don Pedro was harassed from the day of his successful conquest until his death with charges brought against him. The clergy assailed his immoral conduct toward women and his cruelties which disillusioned the pagan Indian and kept him from taking the Christian faith at face value. Rival grabbers attacked him because of his opulence and bureaucrats for his mishandling of public funds.

So Don Pedro set out from Guatemala only three years after invading the land, to the more hazardous conquest of the Spanish court. On his way he tied more firmly his bonds with Cortés and safeguarded his Guatemala interests by becoming engaged to Cecilia Vasquez, the Mexican conqueror's cousin, and by getting Cortés' approval of his brother Jorge as ruler of Guatemala in his absence.

The rude and cunning frontier fighter was as great a success in the grandest court of Europe as in the wilderness. He broke down the fact-citing arguments brought against him in a scandalous process and even bettered his original status. When he once again set sail for the Americas, he was in a marvelous strategic position as husband of Doña Francisca de la Cueva, beloved niece of the Spanish prime minister, the Duke of Albuquerque. Thanks largely to this alliance, made while keenly aware that he was thereby jilting Cortés' cousin, Alvarado now held royal grants strengthening his hold on Guatemala, which then and for centuries to come was a Captaincy-General including all the present-day Central America and areas of southern Mexico. By arrangements Alvarado made on this and a later trip to Spain, the Guatemala Captaincy-General was no longer subservient to Mexico but in most respects responsible directly to the king of Spain.

Another law suit confronted Alvarado on his arrival in Mexico, but he defended himself carefully, justifying with astute apologies all his crimes, and was acquitted.

In Don Pedro's absence, his brother Jorge had moved the capital of Guatemala to a more beautiful, healthier site at the foot of the long dormant volcano called by the Indians Hunahpu, and later by the Spaniards *volcán de Agua.* The new capital was in luxuriant Almolonga Valley, much closer to the gold mines than had been the provisional capital of Iximché and far away from the vexed Cakchiquels. Since his brothers and close followers made a cult of obeying Alvarado's wishes, the new capital, like its predecessor, was named Santiago. Jorge made the name a bit more dramatic calling it *Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala,* or Saint James of the Knights of Guatemala. To glorify the event, Jorge's soldiers whittled with their knives a quaint wooden figure of Santiago, the horseman patron saint of their homeland, the oldest statue to be seen in the museum of la Antigua.

The new capital, today known as Ciudad Vieja (The Old City), came into being with a simple ceremony under a huge *tempisque* tree which still stands after more than four hundred years, spreading wide its green boughs. Father Godinez, who had been the chaplain of the initial invading army, said the first mass under the shade of the tree in front of a crude altar improvised for the statue of the Virgin *del Socorro,* which is still preserved affectionately today and which already was venerated very specially as the first religious sculpture to enter the country, carried along by Alvarado's army of conquest.

When Don Pedro returned from Spain by the end of 1528, the new city of Santiago was beautifully laid out and many fine homes and public buildings had been completed. Some hundred and fifty of the *conquistadores* had settled there, together with the bold Tlaxcala and other Mexican native soldiers who shared in the Conquest. The lands round about the city soon became flourishing farms and life adjusted into what for those times passed as splendor and prosperity. The mines, and the gold dust sifted by enslaved Indians from rivers, attracted peddlers of luxuries from Mexico. The Spanish soldier of humblest beginnings wore proudly his gold ornaments and was attended by a fawning retinue.

From 1528 to 1529 a great division of lands and Indian serfs among all the Spanish *conquistadores* was undertaken which added largely to the settled character and confidence of the capital. A system of division was applied with which Spaniards had had sound experience in recent years in organizing the lands conquered by Ferdinand and Isabella from the Moor. From the forests on the flanks of the nearby volcano came timbers for building. In those forests the Spaniards hunted deer, rabbit, wild pig or *jabalí,* just as the nobility in the homeland was wont to do. Each day Indian women from the neighboring villages hawked through the streets fresh vegetables and flowers woven cunningly into nice bouquets which made the simplest settler's home seem a garden spot. The climate—a spring that lasted all the year, delighted the Spaniards.

Indian labor was at first plentiful and cost virtually nothing. Yet later, the new capital suffered from labor difficulties. The skilled artisans who had filtered in from Spain and Mexico, who had the know-how of building palaces and churches, of working precious metals, iron and leather, and without whose direction the Indian was useless in the towns—these were deeply discontented. As workingmen had found before and would in centuries to come, the craftsmen of Santiago discovered that here where gold was so plentiful its value fell and that by working at the wage fixed by old Spain's traditions, they ended up very poorly off indeed. In 1530 the artisans of Santiago went on what no doubt was the New World's first sit-down strike until a radical increase was added to their wages. Afterwards they got together and threatened to leave unless included with the *conquistadores* in the division of Indian peasant serfs and land. Reluctantly this was granted by the city fathers, who then found that some of these artisans now closed their stores, going to their properties in the country to superintend the labor of their Indians.

Of even greater concern to the settlers than their recalcitrant craftsmen (who in old Spain had been so plentiful and far, far below the soldier, nobleman, and clergyman in the economic and social scale), was the appalling scarcity of Spanish women. Fortunes were spent bringing prospective wives from the homeland and from more populous Spanish settlements in Mexico and the Caribbean islands. Partly because there was such difficulty in finding white wives, many Spanish settlers established themselves on a dignified footing with women chosen from the native and Mexican Indian nobility. Two daughters of the king of Tlaxcala, the Mexican ruler whose hatred for the Aztec emperor Montezuma had led him to aid Cortés and whose soldiers had helped Alvarado conquer Guatemala, made marriages by native rites. One married Jorge de Alvarado, Don Pedro's brother, and was christened in the Catholic religion as Doña Lucia. Another of these princesses, Doña Luisa, long ago had wed Don Pedro himself, whose Spanish noble wife, incidentally, had died in Vera Cruz on the voyage from Spain before he reached Guatemala.

To Don Pedro de Alvarado, most restless of adventurers, the settled life that the capital of Central America represented was scarcely exciting enough, even though there were wives and daughters of friends to seduce, forays into unconquered tribal lands to undertake, and his mines and farms to exploit. He heard that Pizarro was discovering fabulous treasures in Peru and asked his king's permission to go there. While awaiting an answer, he confidently went ahead, building a dozen ocean-going ships at Iztapa on the Pacific coast of Guatemala. When the royal answer finally arrived it said coldly, in effect, "Leave Peru to Pizarro. Look for the Molucca or Spice Islands and conquer them for Spain." This suggestion Don Pedro quietly ignored.

Perhaps sensing, even though ignorant of the distance involved in crossing the Pacific, that East Indian spices were not as appetizing as Inca gold, Alvarado set sail for northern Peru. He took along his Indian consort, Doña Luisa, and their young daughter, Doña Leonor, a band of Spanish horsemen and infantry, and three thousand Indian slaves. The adventure was mainly a story of terrible sufferings in the Andes. The slaves all perished from cold, hunger and disease. Alvarado's arrival was far from welcome to the Spanish leaders who had captured in a most exclusive spirit the mineral-rich lands of the Incas. Tactfully, they offered him the tempting bribe of one hundred thousand gold *pesos,* ostensibly in exchange for some of his ships but with the broad hint that he should sail back at once to his own bailiwick.

Back in his charming but unexciting Guatemalan capital at the foot of the *volcán de Agua,* Don Pedro kept himself busied a while helping himself and his veteran warriors by squeezing as much quick profit as possible from the land and its humiliated natives, circumventing to the maximum the commands of king and Rome intended to protect the Indian from undue exploitation, dodging skillfully any open conflict with these powerful forces. As a cruel but efficient exploiter, he passed orders forbidding the working of Indians ill from smallpox epidemics, and commanded the Spanish landlords for the sake of their own ultimate welfare to nurse sick Indians back to health.

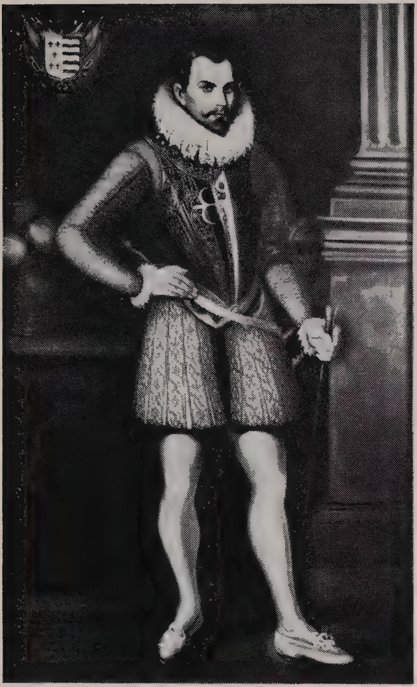
But Alvarado's passionate nature ran counter to his better judgment. His Indian wife, Doña Luisa, had died from the effects of the strenuous Peruvian journey and the handsome, fiery and wealthy Captain-General of Guatemala kept his nobles continually skirmishing, usually without success, for the safeguarding of their wives and daughters.

So much so that when once more Don Pedro sailed for Spain to answer the charges that had piled up against him, the Bishop of Guatemala sent a confidential note to the king urging that should Alvarado return to the New World, he should come appropriately married, so that he would no longer enter into amorous adventure and would be "content with what is his own."

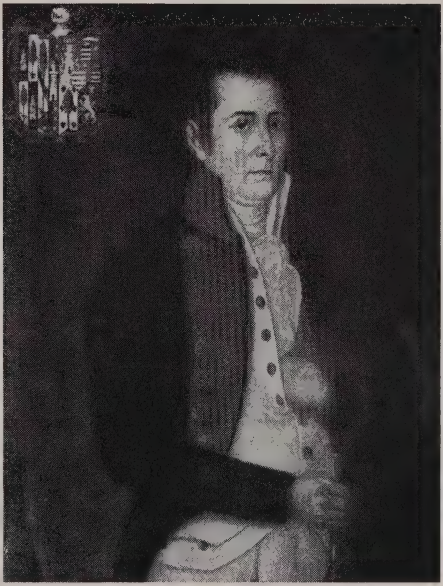
The friendship of Alvarado and the powerful Duke of Albuquerque had remained undisturbed through the years. With the influential Duke's aid, the charges against him were skillfully put aside. When Alvarado again set sail for Guatemala, he brought home as his bride another niece of that grandee, a younger sister of his deceased wife Doña Francisca. Coming as she did from the family of one of the most splendid of all the nobles of the mighty Spanish empire, the new wife of Alvarado, Doña Beatriz de la Cueva, must be suitably accompanied and housed in her new home. So twenty young ladies from noble families came along to help her develop court life in Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala. And their galleon was heavily laden with rich raiment and draperies, jewels and holy images. Don Pedro in a letter to Guatemala announcing the arrival of the twenty girls, said quite frankly that he expected to marry off very soon and advantageously this "merchandise."

From the party's landing place, Puerto Caballos, now Honduran Puerto Cortés, the way to the capital was so poor that Alvarado and his companions waited ten days while a hundred men cleared a path for them. The dainty ladies rode to the highland plateau on the backs of Indian porters.

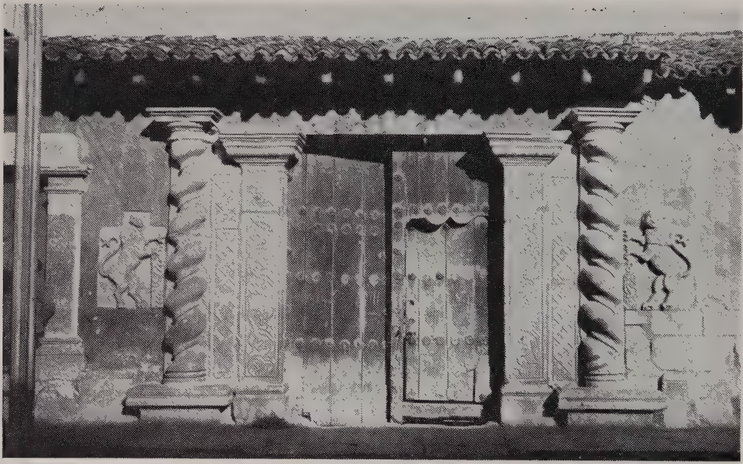
Three months after the arrival of Guatemala's First Lady



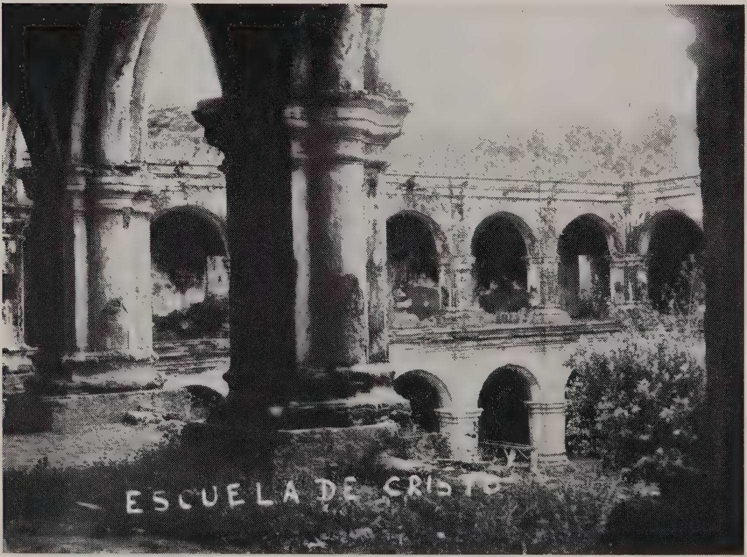
Don Pedro de Alvarado, conqueror of Guatemala.



Don Francisco Xavier de Aguirre y Chamorro, founder of our family in Guatemala.



La Casa de los Leones, built in Antigua by my ancestor, Don Sanchez Alvarez de las Asturias, when the old capital was at the peak of its glory, almost 300 years ago.



Ruins of the monastery of La Escuela de Cristo.

in 1539, the magnificent Palace of the Captains General was completed and she moved into chambers as splendid as those she had left behind in Spain, with all the luxuries such an ambitious and vain a noblewoman could desire, even to having her own private, finely draped chapel above her palace apartments.

In the intervening years, the city had grown mightily. The wealth and power of all Central America centered in this one city, each landlord and mine owner outdoing his neighbor in the splendor of his residence and in contributions to the capital's churches.

A very handsome cathedral, the first church in Central America, was begun in 1529 soon after the arrival of the energetic Dominican missionary, Don Francisco Marroquin, who had made the trip from Spain as chaplain of Doña Francisca, the first Spanish wife of Don Pedro, and had assisted her during her sickness until she died in Vera Cruz. The cathedral was opened with great pomp in 1534. While much Guatemalan wealth was being sent home to Spain by the conquerors, the rich Castillian family of Marroquin, proud that their kin had been raised in 1537 to the position of Bishop of Guatemala, sent funds generously to further his pious efforts, including the construction of his cathedral, which even today is one of the most interesting old structures of Latin America. Surviving beside it in what is now Ciudad Vieja is Marroquin's parochial house as, too, is a church he had built in a village, a few miles away, San Juan del Obispo, where the bishop had his country palace.

The capital also had a great fort, barracks, a hospital built by Bishop Marroquin, dignified government buildings, a number of convents and monasteries to house the religious orders who had come to convert and care for the Indians, and the first school for Spanish boys, founded by the bishop, where with special permission of the king the monks were allowed to teach grammar.

The usual wealthy Spanish home in the city was of stone, surrounding a patio in which grew flowers of many sorts, and back of the house was an orchard and vegetable garden. A nicely carved stone fountain was generally found in the center of the patio.

Gold was still being plentifully produced in the country and there was a frantic search among the settlers for luxury and gaiety. So fashionable had gambling become that the government outlawed loans for the purpose but in spite of such restrictions many fine homes and vast estates changed hands overnight at card games.

Each evening in the Captain-General's palace, Doña Beatriz and Don Pedro entertained lavishly, with a *tertulia* party and choice things to eat and drink. Men smoked cigarettes made by wrapping tobacco in the delicate inner corn husks which they lit from charcoal glowing in a silver brasier. The little court and its guests played cards, the women gossiped, of course, and the men gathered around Don Pedro to make projects of further conquests—the greatest game of their century.

The noble Doña Beatriz welcomed to her court the children Don Pedro had had by Indian women. His favorite, Doña Leonor, granddaughter on her mother's side of the king of Tlaxcala, had married her father's friend, the distinguished but aged nobleman Don Pedro de Portocarrero, when she was thirteen. Left a widow, she had been pressed by her father and Doña Beatriz into marrying the latter's brother, Don Francisco de la Cueva, and with this second husband shared in the activities of the court and capital.

Among the members of the official family of Don Pedro and Doña Beatriz, and also among the masses, piety, patriotism and pleasure went hand in hand. Gay and beautiful religious pageants marked such events as the annual feast day of Santiago, the city's patron saint. The arrival of important visitors was celebrated with huge public festivals. When there was a scarcity of rain, the miraculous statue of the Virgin *del Socorro* which had brought good fortune to Spanish arms during the conquest was taken from its niche in the cathedral and paraded through the streets. "Never is this done," so a chronicler of long ago tells, "but clouds gather, obedient to Her wishes, and soon the worshippers joyously find the rain pouring down, soaking them to the skin. So quickly does rain come at Her command that the statue often must be taken for protection into some church along the way."

Still to be seen in the cathedral of Ciudad Vieja is the lovely Virgin of the Immaculate Conception, second religious sculpture to reach Guatemala during the Conquest. In the days of Don Pedro de Alvarado, and down to the present time, the Virgin is taken in solemn procession on Her feast day, December 8, adorned with rare jewels, many of them belonging to those sixteenth century times: a cross, a butterfly, a fish in precious stones sent to Her by Charles, king of Spain, when the city was founded.

The activities of the missionaries headed by Bishop Marroquin were many, not only in the capital but far out into scarcely known regions of the new colony. In 1536 one of the most forceful of all Spanish missionaries, Fray Bartholomé de las Casas, came from Spain and joined Bishop Marroquin and the rest of the Spanish clergy of Guatemala in their persistent crusade to restrain the greed and abusiveness of their own race and save the Indian from degradation.

To Fray Bartholomé the natives were as entitled to humane treatment as any white man, convinced as he was that only the soul counts and that before God all souls are equal. In the 1530's La Verapaz was a region known as the Land of War because its indomitable inhabitants had resisted successfully all efforts of the Spaniards to subject them. They continued free and as wild as before the Conquest. Their highland territory was rich in an agricultural sense—it was ultimately to become a main coffee-producing zone under German colonists in the twentieth century, but it had none of the get-rich-quick treasures for whose sake a costly attack would have been justified. Audaciously, de las Casas proposed a deal with the secular authorities. He offered to subdue the La Verapaz inhabitants to Spanish authority at no cost of blood or gold, by use of the psychological weapon of his Faith. He refused to undertake this, however, except on two conditions. No Spaniard was to be permitted to enter the region for five years. And even after that no effort was to be made to partition the Indians into *encomiendas* or estates by the system which had made serfs and crushed, virtual slaves of so much of the Guatemalan native population. His conditions were acceded to by skeptical authorities who felt they had nothing to lose by the experiment. To the astonishment of the practical businessmen and stern rulers, de las Casas and a handful of his Dominican followers soon "conquered" La Verapaz, which means the true peace, a vast area which that order of monks dominated peacefully for many years to come, to the betterment of the natives and the enrichment of the Dominican order's churches and institutions.

Year after year, the Dominicans and other missionaries peppered high authorities back home with hair-raising tales of excessive forced labor and vicious punishments for minor infractions of rules, accompanied by warnings that the impatience of mine and land owners for quick profits was killing off "millions"—so they said, of native laborers. The Spanish settlers replied that the Indian refused to work at all unless forced to do so and that such valuable export crops as indigo and cacao grew well only in unhealthy lowlands where fevers killed laborers like flies whether their overseer was kind or cruel.

Don Pedro de Alvarado's booming properties were not in need of his personal attention since he had surrounded himself with such loyal relatives, and the humanity-versus-production struggle developing in Guatemala seemed scarcely thrilling. Investing since 1539 in the building at Itzapa of a number of ships, he turned over the rule to Don Francisco de la Cueva, his wife's brother, and once more set out in 1540 on a grandiose enterprise, the long delayed conquest of the Moluccas. From what we know of Alvarado's character, it is likely he would have been undaunted even had he realized that those fabled spice islands lay many thousands of miles away at the opposite end of the Pacific.

Alvarado first went to the port of Acaxutla, where his navy was waiting for him, and then sailed to the Mexican province of Jalisco to take on provisions. While there, Spanish officials offered to divide all spoils with him if he would join in the search for the mythical Seven Cities of

Cibola, supposed to exist in the present southwest of the United States. The explorations of Coronado a year earlier had reaffirmed rumors of great treasures in that area.

Typically, Alvarado accepted this prospect of quick gains. Then, again in a fashion characteristic of him, he rushed to the rescue of a Spanish army in the Jalisco region threatened with destruction by the Indians. In a frightful battle he got off his horse to lead his men against natives entrenched on a hill, but the horse of a scribe in his company, Montoya, slipped and fell upon him, ramming his heavy armor into his chest. As he was carried to safety he grumbled, "This should happen to anyone stupid enough to bring along a fool like Montoya!" One of his aides asked, "Where do you feel the most pain, Sir?" Alvarado, who by now knew that he was dying, replied, "In my soul." This, it is commonly supposed, showed that he at last regretted his countless misdeeds.

Don Pedro the indomitable conqueror was buried humbly in Guadalajara, Mexico. He had died on the fourth of July, 1541, but it was late in August before official news reached the proud Doña Beatriz in the capital of Guatemala. The widow was prostrated with grief. She and all the court went into the deepest mourning. Her palace was painted black, inside and out—as if she wished to extend all around her the darkness that had invaded her heart.

Her ambitions, though, were not diminished by her grief. Stubbornly, fiercely, against the protests of the city council, the religious and military authorities, Doña Beatriz demanded that she be named her husband's successor as *Governadora* and *Capitana-General* of Guatemala.

At last, on September 9, the statesmen gave in to her and drew up the document making her the ruler. Doña Beatriz's brother, Don Francisco de la Cueva, was specified as her assistant. In signing the statement, she wrote down her name as The Unfortunate Lady Beatrice (La Sin Ventura Doña Beatriz). Then in an impetuous gesture, she scratched the name out, leaving only La Sin Ventura, ordering that she should henceforth be called only that. The Unfortunate One was the first and only woman to be the head of a country of the Western Hemisphere.

After the ceremony, she speedily returned to her lamentations, reproaching all the saints in Heaven for the death of her beloved Don Pedro. Her cries and blasphemies shocked and frightened the courtiers around her, who feared God would punish such irreverence. Bishop Marroquin hurried to the palace, tried to console her, and in vain begged her to accept her misfortunes with fortitude.

Exceptionally heavy rain had been falling for some days and by the morning following Doña Beatriz's assumption of rule, water was up to a man's knees in the streets. It rained so hard that, as a writer of the time put it, "birds had difficulty in flying." Dark clouds hung all day over the city and that night was blacker than any night had been before. Even those not superstitious hurried to their homes and barred their shutters. During the evening of September 10, one of the three nearby volcanoes, the one now called Fuego, began roaring. Earthquakes started to be felt and as they grew more and more violent, houses in the city were heard crashing.

The storm increased, meanwhile. Rain fell harder. Thunder claps terrified the people. A strong wind tore off roofs. About midnight the roaring of the *volcán de Fuego* redoubled. Abruptly an immense cloud of black smoke followed by colossal flames rose high over its crater producing a powerful concussion felt through the city. Many frightened citizens recalled a tale they had heard from the Indians about an ancient Quiché-Maya king, Quicab the Great. In his dreams the king had seen his tribe oppressed by men with white faces. And before Quicab died, he instructed his followers to bury him in the crater of the volcano now called Agua, saying that should his dreams come true, his spirit would carry out its revenge from that high spot.

The large crater of the *volcán de Agua* had been filling with rainwater through the past days. Suddenly, at about two in the morning, the trembling of the earth made a wide breach in the rim of the crater facing the city. The pent-up waters gushed down, snapping off tree trunks like tiny twigs, bearing huge boulders along. People became frantic. Screams and groans from those half crushed by a wall or a heavy beam could be heard, as well as the howling of dogs, the neighing of horses and the bellowing of the cattle. As the wild river came through the center of the city, trees and rocks which it carried along smashed into those houses not already demolished by earthquakes. Water rose in dwellings. Flames spouting from the *volcán de Fuego* lit the terrible scene and helped some people gain the sturdily resisting walls of the cathedral, to climb big trees, or race out of danger. Some say that a sorceress named Agustina in the shape of a black cow with one horn galloped through the city tossing people, who had a chance to escape, into the surging flood.

Doña Beatriz, the ruler of the city and the land, the self-styled Unfortunate One, had hurried for safety earlier that night to the strongly built chapel in the highest part of the palace, a place still to be seen today in Ciudad Vieja—in ruins. With her were eleven of her ladies-in-waiting, and Doña Anica, a five-year-old illegitimate child of Don Pedro. The woman ruler and her company spent the hours praying, The Unfortunate One clinging to a great effigy of Christ Crucified which was on the altar. The earthquakes became more severe each minute. In the early morning hours a tremor mightier than any before came to shake the walls so badly that the stone and stucco vaulting of the chapel collapsed upon her and her companions, silencing forever the lamentations of La Sin Ventura Doña Beatriz.

The next day, survivors came straggling back to search for the bodies of their loved ones. The palace and other buildings were found buried in debris and mud. Whole families had been killed. Few of the living were unscathed. Many were so injured that they soon died. Some survivors who roamed the tumbled ruins went nearly naked, others wore only a carpet grabbed in flight from a floor, or a bedspread. When the body of the Unfortunate One was discovered, many wanted to cast it to the dogs, so convinced were they that her blasphemies had led God thus to punish her capital. Only Bishop Marroquin saved her corpse from desecration. He buried her in the cathedral. Eleven of her dead ladies-in-waiting, who had come so young and hopeful to this fair New World, were buried in a single grave, also in the cathedral. The great *conquistador* Don Pedro de Alvarado, the man of so many amorous adventures, who had been El Adelantado to his emperor, and who, because of his blue eyes, golden hair and beard, and his white skin had been called by the Indians Tonatiuh or Son of the Sun, had had no children by his Spanish wives, and after the destruction of the capital, only one of all his children survived. His favorite daughter Doña Leonor, who looked like him, saved herself that night by jumping into an empty bathtub which bore her over the stormy waters to safety.

When a meeting was held in the cathedral to decide whether to rebuild the city or move the capital elsewhere, only ninety citizens were able to attend, and of those, many had bandaged arms and heads, or came limping. The gloomy band of survivors voted that Don Francisco de la Cueva, brother of la Sin Ventura, together with Bishop Marroquin, should be their interim rulers and that the capital should be moved to the delightful valley of Panchoy, which seemed at an entirely safe distance from volcanoes.

6

THE GLORIOUS SANTIAGO DE LOS CABALLEROS DE GUATEMALA

Antigua

THE FERTILE AND PEACEFUL VALLEY of Panchoy lay just a few miles further away from the beautiful but terrible volcanoes than the destroyed capital, and all who see it consider it one of the most charming spots on earth. It was already familiar to the inhabitants of the old capital, for here were fine farms and a number of villages whose Indians had for years brought fruits and vegetables to the market of the main city. An illustrious engineer made a study of the Panchoy site and assured the hesitant colonists that its location was such that severe earthquakes were unlikely and such a flood as had gushed down the flanks of Agua Volcano, scattering buildings and human beings before it, was impossible. The memory of earthquakes suffered was so much less than that of the terrible cascade of waters, that the leaders no longer hesitated and the tedious task of moving into the newly laid-out capital began.

Religious processions from the old ruins to the new place served to solemnize the occasion, to bring the blessings of God on the future center of rule and faith, and incidentally helped in the arduous task of safely conveying sacred images over the poor road. In 1543, on the feast day of Corpus Christi, two years after the great flood and quake killed Doña Beatriz, the Unfortunate One, a procession bore the Holy Sacrament to the new location. That may be considered the conclusive inauguration of this third Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala. Pending royal approval, the wish of the Adelantado Don Pedro de Alvarado was followed, nor did the Spanish King fail to respond to popular request that the cherished and already glorious title be applied. In fact, the title of the capital was more firmly established than ever some time afterwards when Philip II of Spain added flattering words to the name. It now became La Muy Noble y Muy Leal Ciudad de Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala (The Very Noble and Very Loyal City of Saint James of the Knights of Guatemala) —a title which aroused patriotic fervor among the high bureaucracy but struck the native-born as a very easy way by which the far-off ruler tried to gain their continued devotion.

The site was most favorable to human happiness—except for earthquakes. Meadows blossomed with fragrant wildflowers and from numerous apiaries the Spaniards and Indians got fine honey for mead and sweets and beeswax candles for home and religious use. The Indians of the valley had learned years before to grow vegetables and fruits from seed brought by the far-sighted missionaries from Spain, Cuba, the Canary Islands. All around the wide valley were hills cutting off strong winds. The Pensativo and Guacalate rivers crossed through it. There were a number of fine springs, some channeled to bring pure cold water to the new city, others running hot, others rich in chemicals that could cure a variety of ills. Neighboring streams gave power by which mills ran, grinding the wheat produced on plantations lying within easy reach. Farmers raised the newly imported sugar-cane; others cared for olive trees from which oil was obtained. Still other enterprising colonists, secular and belonging to religious brotherhoods, with numerous Indian servitors, raised herds of cattle and sheep of European stock. Meat was sold at very low prices in the new city's five butcher shops, for domestic animals thrived in this balmy healthy upland, but nobody ate meat except the Spaniards. The Indians were so traditionally attached to their predominantly vegetarian diet that they were uninterested in the new-fangled delicacy. Raw hides were the main objective of the cattle breeders, for these brought high prices when exported to Spain.

Under guidance of the distinguished engineer, Don Juan Bautista Antonelli, the city was laid out along lines that even today are attractive and convenient. Streets crossed each other at right angles, as in modern cities, in an overall plan for the well-being of the population. At various intersections parks and plazas were arranged, totalling eleven. As always where Spanish influence prevailed, there was a central plaza around which were grouped the Cathedral and the most important official buildings, such as the palace of the Captains-General, the agencies of justice, the Palacio del Ayuntamiento or town hall and even the bishop's palace—in short, a civic center such as in the most up-to-date United States cities I have seen. In the center of the plaza still to be seen is the Fountain of the Sirens built during the rule of the Count of la Gomera, one of the finest Captains-General—officials always sent by the King of Spain. This charming fountain is unique in that the water pours into the main octagonal basin from the breasts of four naked mermaids. In the half century after its founding, the city grew to be the third greatest center of the Americas, only excelled in grandeur by the capitals of Peru and Mexico.

The city assigned special streets in the outskirts to various trades—for instance, the street of the jewelers, the street of the bakers, and the *calle ancha de los Herreros* (the wide street of the metal workers). Along this street in early times were fashioned the nails, horse shoes, locks and keys and all the iron equipment needed in houses. In metal and other construction trades, artisans who had served their apprenticeship in Spain flourished, with Indians as helpers and as eager, intelligent students of their trade. The tragic necessity of rebuilding an entire capital so few years after the rise of the now ruined Ciudad Vieja meant a bustling activity for the craftsmen. Lime kilns, brick works, quarries and wood-carving ateliers had their hands full for many years to come.

Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala rapidly became beautiful, famed for its sumptuous homes and public buildings and churches. Fear of earthquakes led to the use of sturdy walls three to four feet thick. The desire to indicate visually the importance of Spanish rule to the awestruck natives and to make their own posts dignified and agreeable encouraged royal governors and local leaders to spend generously in making official quarters imposing and attractive.

The city was the headquarters not only for the secular control of all Central America but for intensive Church efforts to Christianize the Indians and hold the colonists firm to their faith. From Santiago, the bishops of Guatemala extended their activities through all the lands between those under the archbishop of Mexico and the present Panama Canal. Just as the various religious sects in a modern city of the United States vie with one another in building temples and institutions as testimonials of their confidence and power, so there was strong yet friendly rivalry among Dominican, Franciscan, and many other Catholic organizations in Antigua (a name which we must remember was only given to this capital after its evacuation in the eighteenth century).

National and family pride, religious and political zeal, precautions against earthquakes—all human virtues and vices worked together to make Santiago a mighty center of culture and splendor. No other city for many hundreds of miles around attempted to compete with it. The wealth of the nobility, of great mine owners and landlords, the gains of religious orders from properties and donations—all were poured into developing an enduring city to the glory of God and Spain.

Monks skilled as painters and sculptors were paid only in earthly and eternal honor as they joyously labored to embellish churches and convents built of stone, brick and stucco by the practically free toil of Indians. The activities and whereabouts of native labor were closely controlled whether or not the Indians were officially classed as slaves. In its heyday Santiago had twenty-four churches, eighteen monasteries and convents, fifteen hermitages and chapels, five hospitals, a hospice for orphans, eight prisons and seventy thousand citizens without counting large numbers of Indians in the outlying villages. Four of the churches boasted large clocks imported at great expense, to help worshippers get to mass punctually. Today, after blows from many earthquakes, after a great majority of its art treasures have perished or been taken to the later capital, Guatemala City, Antigua continues to be the most dramatic of all monuments of Spanish rule in the Americas.

Santiago, the third capital, did not fear difficulties with the Indians, who were well under control except in far-off regions. Nor did the beautiful volcanoes on the horizon give signs of restlessness. But there was some danger through the years from "Lutheran corsairs" and freebooters. The colony condoned the smuggling that went on openly after the Spanish throne forbade trading with foreigners in 1556 on pain of death, but the adventurers who helped in this lawless export of dyes, gold and cacao to Spain's enemies also banded together independently to harass the trade routes. In the fifteen seventies Andrew Barker of Bristol plundered the Atlantic ports of Guatemala. After him came Christopher Newport, feared by the Spaniards under the name of Cristobal Neoporcio. Usually by the time the capital heard of a pirate raid, the looters had been diven off or had departed with all the merchandise piled at Izabal or other export centers, and life went on merrily in Santiago except in the counting houses immediately affected. True, travel to Spain had to be curtailed, it was hazardous to send for one's family and the bonds with the motherland were weakened to the advantage of local interests and patriotism, but on the whole Santiago took raids on the Atlantic coast calmly.

Quite otherwise was the effect of the report in 1579 that the much dreaded Sir Francis Drake was cruising along the Pacific shores of Central America. If he landed in strength the journey inland to Santiago could bring him speedily to the capital which had not been walled and whose garrison was weak. Guns were rushed from Mexico. Bits of bronze were hastily collected and cast with great difficulty into five cannon. These were put on board three ships which sailed out in the Pacific boldly seeking the terrible marauder who, however, was never sighted. A further scare mobilized the capital for its own defense when the Worshipful Master Thomas Cavendish was reported a few years later plundering the Guatemalan ships that traded in those days between Pacific ports, exchanging precious cargoes with Peru and Mexico, distributing fine goods that had crossed on Spanish ships from China.

The chronicle of pirate raids goes on: Pié de Palo (Peg Leg) and Diego the Mulatto with 1500 buccaneers are driven off the Atlantic coast after a nine-day battle; the Dutch pirate, Maurice of Nassau, with a thousand followers fights a vain eleven-day battle for possession of seven hundred precious cases of cacao, vanilla, indigo and other dyes awaiting shipment to Spain.

By 1640 the central government in Santiago at last realized the need to take firm measures against all pirates, not only in defense of the capital proper. Together with the governments of Cuba and Santo Domingo a joint campaign was undertaken—one of the very first "inter-American" cooperative efforts. Islands off the Atlantic coast were cleared of their Indian inhabitants who had been supplying pirates with provisions. These natives were relocated in the region of Golfo Dulce and Lake Izabal (a corrupted form of Isabel, the queen of Spain who had financed the first expedition of Columbus).

A generation later, pirates were still earning a lucrative living plundering the Spanish Main, and the capital once again had grave fears for its own safety when one of the most adventurous of all, François l'Olonnois, pillaged the coast in the 1660's with a big force and tried to get his men to march against Santiago. They refused, so he settled down on the coast, waiting three months for the arrival of a ship from Spain rumored to be loaded with goods of high value. The pirates duly captured the ship—to find that its cargo was only paper! Paper was useless to them but worth its weight in gold to the newly established Guatemalan printing press.

Spain and England agreed to outlaw piracy in 1670 but this did not bring any notable let-up of buccaneer activities. The freebooters merely exchanged their loot in New England and the Carolinas instead of in British home ports, and during the wars between Spain and Britain there were further threats of officially sanctioned enemy attacks from the Pacific against the wealthy capital of Guatemala.

Exploitation of the vast area ruled from Santiago went steadily ahead meanwhile, but even the enterprising landlords of far-flung plantations and the daring missionaries kept their hearts and minds pretty closely tied to the charming cultural, social, and religious life of the capital. They went far out into little-known regions, blazing new trails, acquiring new wealth and new converts, but returning as often as possible to their beloved city, leaving their families there, retiring to live there after amassing wealth. Just as in modern Spain large tracts of land are owned by landlords whose main interests are in Madrid or Seville, so it was with seventeenth-century Santiago.

Because of this centering of attention on it, the immediate region of Santiago was very familiar to a great number of cultured Europeans, while nature in more secluded areas was still viewed as mysterious and highly exotic. The most scientific writer of the time, the author of the famous

Recordacion Florida, mixed fact and rumor charmingly. He tells how the little *armadillos* kill deer, explaining that they have a special hatred for the beast. The *armadillo,* he says, lies on its back in the rainy season until rain water collects in the concavity of its belly. It waits patiently. At last a deer comes along to drink this water. Thereupon the *armadillo* closes its shell tightly over the nostrils of its enemy, suffocating it to death. . . . The *armadillo,* when chased by men, rolls itself into a ball and hurtles down steep slopes, landing safely far below. . . . Pigeons come in flocks so thick that they darken the sky. The Indians consider them a presage of hunger, probably because when they settle on a field, no more is left than if a swarm of locusts had landed. The natives kill them with sticks. . . . Porcupines are hunted for their needles which the Indians roast, grind to powder and take in hot water or wine as a cure for colds. . . . The *tacuatzin's* tail, roasted and powdered, aids women in labor. It has a pouch into which it shovels the earth when burrowing a hole for its nest in the ground. Then it scatters the earth far and wide so that hunters cannot detect the hole by any mound. . . . The uncured skin of a coyote worn as gloves cures paralysis. . . . Alligators hold their jaws open after eating fish and little birds come and pick their teeth clean. . . . Army ants invade native cottages, eat up all vermin such as cockroaches, scorpions, bedbugs, small snakes. When all the vermin is eaten the ants peacefully depart. They never molest people unless disturbed before their task is done. . . . There is a snake called *tepulcuat* which has a head at each end of its body. Halfway between the heads is a protruding tube serving as end of its digestive tract. . . . There are birds whose underwings glow with phosphorescence. They fly ahead of travelers at night to show the way, singing *jujuyo, jujuyo.* The Indians believe they have stars under their wings. . . . A sort of lobster has a bunch of seeds in its body. When these are planted vines grow, bearing beautiful small golden gourds much prized by the natives. And so on and on the old tales go.

The early European colonists were fascinated by the strange life around them, whose nature they were trying to grasp without too clear an idea of what was scientifically exact. This interest extended to strange human births. When Siamese twins were born to an Indian woman in 1675, the author of the *Recordacion Florida* wrote at great length about them. They were exhibited in the capital and there was talk of sending them embalmed to Spain, but they finally were buried in their native village. The pious Guatemalan chronicler said that he considered the case of the "monster" worth reporting "so that those who read shall praise the goodness of God who, being able to make all of us in such form, instead created us perfect and in His own image, liberating us of similar defects merely by His kindness with no merit on our part."

Exotic truths and scientifically uncertain reports of nature in the New World could be safe subjects of literature but in matters closely linked to religion, the Inquisition, with headquarters in Santiago, saw to it that Spaniards and Indians did not stray. In the central plaza there were gallows and whipping posts and they were frequently occupied. Orders to found the Inquisition arrived from Spain in 1572 and were opened and read to the municipal council of the city. Although applying to the moral discipline of everyone in the vast realm of Guatemala it was most severe in the area of the capital. The house where judgment was passed and suspects tortured is still there, facing the College of the Jesuits. In it were cells for prisoners, some so small that the inmate had to remain standing. During the years of its existence, two hundred and sixty-one cases were tried by the Inquisition of Guatemala. One case concerned a Jew, one suspect was charged with polygamy, two cases dealt with men who had made pacts with the devil, two were for blasphemy, two against slaves, seven for sacrilege, eighty-four for heresy. In eigthteen cases sorcerers and witches were convicted and received penalties, and one hundred and forty-four persons were punished for practicing superstitions. One Indian woman, Matea Lopez, sentenced as a witch, was kept imprisoned for eleven years. Periodically the Inquisition took her from her cell, shaved her head and paraded her mounted on a mule through the streets of the city. A juggler, convicted of sorcery, was stripped, his body was coated with a sticky tar-like substance and he was then rolled in chicken feathers. Another man was burned alive for having inquired whether Adam and Eve had umbilical cords and navels.

Normally, in spite of some fanatic cruelties and the public execution of criminals, life was gay and full of pageantry in the wealthy capital. Festivals on the 25th of July in honor of the Apostle Santiago and on November 22, the feast day of Saint Cecilia, were particularly splendid. The ladies of the nobility would gather on the long balcony of the Palace of the Captains-General, facing the main plaza, and watch the strolling throngs, the luxuriously equipped carriages, the extravagantly dressed gentlemen riding on their fine horses. In the plaza, bull fights were held, continuing a tradition started on Santiago's Day, 1532, in the previous capital, when bulls imported from Cuba were fought.

The promenade on Saint Cecilia Day was the most brilliant of all. Only on that occasion each year was the royal pennant shown to the public. The parade passed through the plaza and main streets of the city. First came a company of lancers followed by many pages bearing banners, then the noblemen who had foregathered from all over the realm. Mounted on prancing steeds, they were dressed in dazzling velvet breeches, embroidered jackets and highly ornamented hats. After them came allegorical floats. One representing Music bore a child dressed to symbolize Genius, surrounded by musical instruments. The cart of Saint Cecilia was drawn by bullocks whose backs were adorned with ribbons, their horns gilded. In this cart the statue of Saint Cecilia stood on a cage full of white pigeons, a harp garlanded with flowers beside her. The members of the city council closed the parade, in their most dignified costumes, with long white plumes floating from their hats. Their leader bore the great royal pennant, which had accompanied the Spaniards throughout their conquest of the land. As the parade moved along, gay tunes were played by bands of musicians escorting the marchers.

Festivities were lavish on such occasions as the inauguration of the second cathedral of this city in 1680. The first cathedral erected by Bishop Marroquin had proven to be poorly built and was pulled down. In the course of tearing it down the tombs of Don Pedro de Alvarado and Doña Beatriz, the Unfortunate One, were unwittingly destroyed. Doña Leonor, before she died, had transferred their remains and buried them under the main altar.

Detailed records exist describing the solemn inauguration of the second cathedral with its chapel for the revered Virgin *del Socorro.* The festivities lasted eight days. Each morning, religious functions, each afternoon parties for children, and in the evenings, fireworks which never failed to delight and awe the Indians, the Negro slaves and servants. The main procession of the inauguration festival was headed by lay readers of the diocese on horseback and the two highest civil and military authorities. The latter wore pale-blue satin with lace cuffs, and slung from their shoulders were short capes of white brocade trimmed with pommels. Following them, on white horses, came the two mayors of the city, dressed in crimson velvet, their sleeves striped with silver brocade. Their capes were of dark blue satin. One of the mayors was my ancestor, Don Sancho Alvarez de las Asturias Nava y Moroña. Each of the four nobles wore a black hat with a great white feather, attached by a diamond buckle. After them came triumphal chariots drawn by mules covered by silk drapes through which ears and eyes alone could be seen. In the chariots rode the prettiest señoritas of Santiago attired to represent episodes in the Bible.

In a sense the annual festival called the Dance of the Volcano was even more dramatic than the solemn religious and patriotic ceremonies. Given in late summer when nights were as bright as day under a huge moon, the festival was rehearsed and prepared for months ahead by hundreds and thousands of the native townsfolk and villagers. It commemorated a great uprising of 1526, the last important Indian effort to shake off the Spanish yoke. Leading the revolt were King Sinacam of the Cakchiquel tribe and Sequechul, one of the puppet kings of the Quichés.

Don Pedro de Alvarado had left for Mexico and Don Pedro de Portocarrero, first husband of Doña Leonor, was in charge of the colony when news of the native insurrection was received. A small army of 745 men set out toward the volcano where the rebels were entrenched. At Quezaltenango a loyal band of Indian archers joined the Spanish army. After a fierce battle on the flanks of the volcano the two rebel leaders were captured to languish in prison for fifteen years until Don Pedro de Alvarado took them off with him on his fatal "Molucca" expedition from which they never returned.

I think it strange from our modern viewpoint that the Dance of the Volcano festival was so highly popular with the conquered native population. The Indians flocked from all parts of the realm to take part in it. Their zeal in remembering their defeat stemmed, I suspect, from the fact that the festival at least put the native on a footing of manliness, recalling they were warriors as well as slaves. Traditionally the native governor of the nearby village of Jocotenango was given the role of impersonating the conquered King Sinacam. So prized was this honor that once the Jocotenango governor scornfully refused the large sum of 500 *pesos* from the governor of Itzapa who wished to take his place.

A huge pyramid of wood was built days before the festival in the main plaza of Santiago. Shortly prior to the party, flowers and branches were attached to the scaffolding so that a good likeness of a volcanic peak resulted. Living monkeys, *dantas,* deer, wild pig or *jabali,* parrots, wild turkeys, other birds and various small animals trapped for the purpose were chained here and there on the pyramid's sides—a veritable zoo which fascinated the city people, many of whom never left the civilized area of the capital and so found all this most exotic and exciting. Crowds gathered about that night, afoot or in their carriages, while bands played weird haunting melodies from the midst of the foliage and from a hut at the peak of the "volcano."

Next day, fresh flowers and branches replaced those faded during the night. Spanish horsemen then filed into the plaza and took up positions to guard against disorders. They were followed by Indians in primitive costumes, many nearly naked, all elaborately adorned with feathers. The natives bore lances, bows and harmlessly snub-nosed arrows. Next came bands playing aboriginal airs on strange instruments together with groups dancing primitive native steps as they moved slowly forward. The richest and most important men of Jocotenango approached, meanwhile performing an impressive and fanciful dance. The *caciques* of a number of proud Indian villages marched into the square in their finest traditional costumes with the flattering odd addition of plumed Spanish hats. They came surrounding the governor of Jocotenango, dressed as King Sinacam, borne high in a litter richly trimmed with quetzal feathers. On men's shoulders so as never to touch the ground, "King Sinacam" was carried up the volcano and installed on a throne in the hut at its peak.

A sham battle followed reproducing the Indian's last valiant stand for freedom. War drums and shouts came defiantly from the top of the volcano. The descendants of the Mexican Tlaxcala and Cholula soldiers who had sided with the Spaniards in the historical battle came into the plaza from Ciudad Vieja where they had settled and remained in spite of the moving of the capital. These were dressed in Spanish style, with swords and banners. They moved forward against the Indians on the volcano, skirmishing, exchanging arrows and lance blows with them. The rebels gradually retreated up the mountain slope until "King Sinacam" was captured by the attackers at the top. The Governor of Ciudad Vieja ceremoniously put a chain on the vanquished king and led him down the mountain, presenting him to the officials who had been watching the pageant from the Palace of the Captains-General. After this, the various groups again withdrew in order from the plaza, accompanied by cheerful noisy bands.

Such pageantry played a great part in appeasing native feelings in the more settled regions. Meanwhile the missionaries in their well-equipped monasteries had been making thoughtful studies of the native languages and analyzing the Indian religions and superstitions with the hope of finding "soft spots" by which Christianity might infiltrate with a minimum of opposition and social upheaval.

The spirit of Friar Bartholomé de las Casas hovered over the monastery and church of the Dominicans, most powerful of all the religious institutions in Santiago in the latter part of the sixteenth century. In the following two centuries, the Dominican order continued extending its power in the capital, acquiring much city and farm land, a silver mine, sugar plantations, running a water mill. Referring to the Dominicans' silver and gold religious ornaments, the gold-plated altars, rich vestments, majestic carvings and statues of their church, an early chronicler said, "Seeing so much beauty and such immense wealth, you could hardly believe you were on earth and not in heaven." Of all this pomp, virtually nothing but a few formless masses of stone and plaster remain today—unless we recall the spiritual and cultural achievements of the

Dominicans which after all far outweigh any visible monument to their glory.

Surpassed only by the Dominicans in power were the Franciscan monks. The immense Franciscan monastery and church occupied an entire city block and were among the most important of early buildings to rise in Santiago. The monastery was founded in 1544 by Fray Toribio de Benavente whom the Indians called Motolinia or "The Poor Man" after they had watched mighty Cortés in Mexico kneel and kiss the friar's shabby robe. In the monastery there were a meteorological station and a printing press. Its crypts still contain the remains of many famous men, including the sculptors Juan de Aguirre and Alonso de Paz, and the painter Villalpando. In the vast building were schools for teaching reading, writing and woodcarving to Indian boys, besides their seminary, their music room, library and a large dining room and kitchen. Near the refectory was a cell where friars undergoing punishment were kept without food but in a position where they could watch their brethren eating the delicious meals which were customary in the monasteries of those days. You can still look down from second-story galleries on the ruins across impressive patios.

The church of the Franciscans is in ruins, yet huge pillars and arches tell of its former magnificence. In the days of its prime, the church had a fountain behind the main altar through whose high-spouting water the morning sun cast rainbow colors on the Tabernacle.

The small chapel of the Third Order, containing the tomb of that humble but illustrious saint, Hermano Pedro, is nowadays the only part of the formerly grandiose church which is in use. In this chapel are several fine art objects preserved from the days prior to the great earthquake of 1773, including a touching sculpture of Christ Crucified, said to be made of compressed corn husks, coated with innumerable layers of varnish.

Since preoccupation with their faith was intricately involved with all phases of the Spaniards' colonial life in Guatemala, the story of Antigua's religious activities and its numerous churches and convents could fill volumes. For instance, there is the beautiful church of La Merced, which suffered very little from the earthquakes and was soon restored. Attached to it was a monastery in whose ruined patio is seen a gigantic fountain where the gourmet friars raised fish for their meals. La Merced contained great art treasures and was famous for having a miraculous and mysterious image of Our Lady de las Mercedes about which the following story is told. A ship captain about to sail from Spain was given a coffer by a stranger, with the request that it be delivered to the head of this monastery. When the sealed chest was opened, the sacred effigy in it was found to exude an exquisite perfume. From a wound in its side a fragrant liquid continued to drip which had extraordinary healing properties when applied to afflicted persons.

Other institutions of religious orders included the monastery and church of the Jesuits, today the public market of Antigua, those of La Escuela de Cristo, and those of La Recoleccion, of which one immense arch alone remains.

Conventś to house and train nuns for the care of the daughters of the nobility were among the most imposing buildings in this great center of Catholicism in Central America. Of the convent of Santa Rosa where the daughters of some of the richest families studied and sought seclusion from the world, there remains the façade of the charming little church and the crumbling convent itself. Nearby are the ruins of the Beatas Indias, a humbler convent for Indian girls exclusively. The convent of the Capuchinas still has its massive pillars and a large circular court surrounded by immense rooms downstairs and cells once used by the nuns upstairs. There also is the curious two-story Torre del Retiro, a large tower with formidable walls. On the lower floor the nuns washed the linen from the churches, for they specialized as laundresses, ironing perfectly the garments of friars and priests. On the second floor are still tiny cells where nuns and novices remained during spiritual exercises at which time they were supposed not to speak a word. Here they were confined, too, as punishment for serious sins.

Some of the former grandeur of the Santa Clara convent can be glimpsed by visiting the two-story arched building, and by admiring the charming tiled fountain which has been removed to a patio of the Palace of the Captains-General. As to the Catarina nuns, their past glories in Antigua are dramatized by the huge arch of Santa Catarina which serves as a noble frame for the view of the Agua volcano. The arch is actually a bridge that spans a street and used to connect two buildings occupied by these nuns. It was constructed hollow so that the sisters and the young girls under their protection could cross over without being seen by the public on the street below. The story of this convent is closely related to the life of the remarkable Sor Elvira de San Francisco. Found as an infant abandoned at the portal of the Church of the Conception, presumably the offspring of an unmarried señorita of noble lineage, she came to be the convent's first Mother Superior.

Through the efforts of the ninth bishop of Guatemala, Fray Payo Enriquez de Rivera, Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala was able to boast of having the third printing press in the Americas, the first in Central America. A Spanish printer, Don José Pineda de Ibarra, arrived in 1660 with family and equipment. The first periodical in Central America, the *Gazeta de Goatemala,* incidentally, was published at Santiago, first appearing in 1729. Four years after this latter date, Central American coins first were issued from the newly established mint at the capital. They were silver pieces bearing the effigy of Philip V, "King of Spain and of the Indies" on one side and on the reverse a Latin inscription, "Wisdom begins with the fear of God." Before that, Guatemalan authorities had issued crude handmade silver "macacas"—coins which the Indians avidly collected and many of which are still used to decorate native necklaces.

Of all the institutions of learning in Santiago, the handicraft schools and reading and writing classes for the Indians, the seminaries and places for the study of law, medicine and theology, the most famous and important were the Jesuit Seminary of San Francisco de Borja, founded in 1615, and San Carlos University whose beautiful building is now used as museum in which many fascinating relics of colonial days are kept. The first bishop of Guatemala, the illustrious Don Francisco Marroquin, had had such a center of learning as one of his greatest unfulfilled dreams and had left a large sum in his will to help in its founding. A century went by before la Real y Pontifica Universidad de San Carlos Borromeo was inaugurated in 1678, yet even then it was one of the four earliest universities in the Western Hemisphere. Only Harvard in the present United

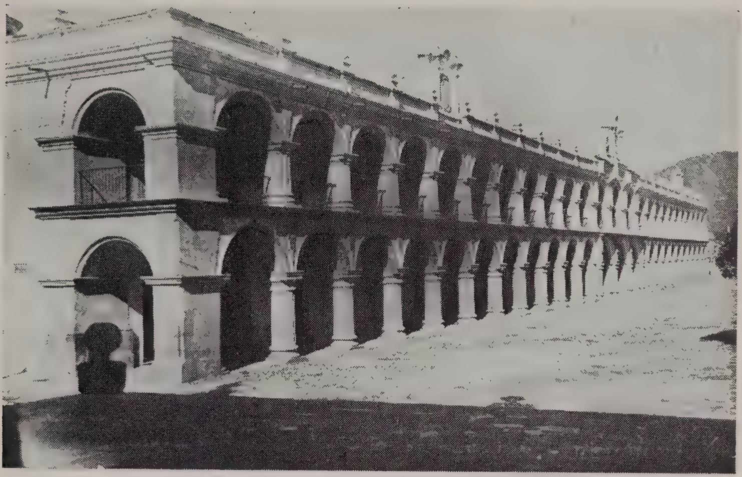
States, and Mexican and Peruvian universities preceded it. Many noted leaders graduated from San Carlos: a surgeon to the Spanish king, several bishops, the first poet of Central America of whom I will tell more further on. It also graduated a strangely unorthodox thinker, who caused his alma mater much sorrow when he was found guilty by the Inquisition of having embraced Judaism.

The rules of San Carlos University seem severe and quaint today. Neither teachers nor students could follow the custom of their time as to dress. Colored stockings and gold-embroidered clothing were forbidden. Instead, very plain uniform clothes were prescribed, with simple white collars for the students. Negroes, Chinese, mulattoes, *sambos* (the children of Negro and Indian mixed parentage), and the sons of criminals could not attend the University. Only a student belonging to the nobility could be awarded the highest degrees.

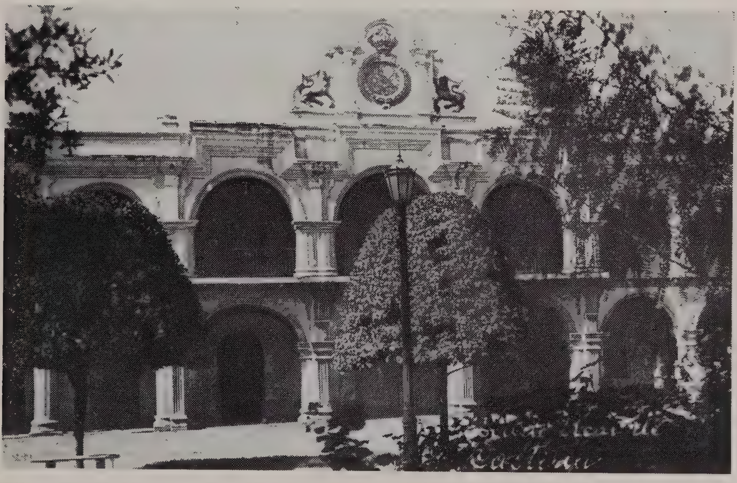
While convents, colleges, and imposing governmental offices were sources of pride to Santiago, its inhabitants of Spanish blood lived busy and gay lives in fine homes which were virtually palaces. The private mansions of the wealthy and noble were chiefly of one story, built of exceptionally heavy masonry in hopes of resisting earthquakes. The finer of these houses had three patios. Patios were built following Spanish traditions, and also with an eye to a safe refuge for the occupants in case of earthquakes. When tremors began, the poor had to rush for safety into streets and plazas, but the rich had their own ample patios to which they could quickly flee from their sleeping quarters while maintaining their privacy from the outer world. The first patio was surrounded by the rooms occupied by the master and his relatives. It was a charming garden place planted with trees, bushes and many flowers, with a fountain in the center. Around this typical patio ran a spacious shaded arcade similar to those of cloisters with strong wooden pillars on stone bases as columns to sustain the roof. Invariably in one corner there was a *bucaro* or font finely carved in stone or made of delicately painted tiles. The poor got their drinking water from twenty-five fountains distributed through the plazas. From the *bucaro* the rich families could get cool pure drinking water at any hour. The second patio was encircled by the servant quarters and the third in the rear was a sort of highly civilized barnyard where horses, coaches and domestic animals were kept.

Leading from the main entrance of the typical Santiago mansion to the first patio was the *zaguan,* a broad hall with stone benches running along its sides. Here sat beggars to eat the food which each wealthy lady of Santiago distributed on fixed days. The *zaguan* was paved with small stones between which hoofs of calves, lambs or goats were cemented in, upside down, forming fancy designs and the date the house had been finished. The wide and sturdy double door opening on the street, through which the coach-and-four of the master or the carriages of his guests would drive, passing the *zaguan* to the first patio, was elaborately trimmed with heavy bronze ornaments and knockers. Windows facing on the street were protected by iron, bronze or hardwood bars, beautifully worked, suggesting dignity and charming aloofness yet strong enough to prevent the entrance of an intruder.

Nowadays the charm of living in the epoch of Santiago's glory is recaptured in a number of fine mansions that have been repaired in recent years and are in use as showplaces, homes, or hotels. The best known are la Casa de los



The Palace of the Captains-General, Antigua.



The coat-of-arms atop the palace is that of Charles the Third, King of Spain when the building was finished.

The Fountain of the Sirens.

Arco de Santa Catarina
Antigua Guatemala
C.A.
265.

The arch of Santa Catarina, with the Volcan de Agua in the background.

Leones; la Casa de las Campanas; la Casa de Chamorro, so full of historic memories, now called the Hotel Alcazar, belonging to Mr. and Mrs. José Llarena Z.; la Casa Popenoe or del Capuchino; and la Casa known as El Jaulon (perhaps the oldest), built by Doña Leonor and Don Francisco de la Cueva, and recently transformed into an artistically decorated hotel by the owners, Mr. and Mrs. Oscar Murúa.

My family is closely associated with the ancient days of la Casa de los Leones, so named because of the huge rampant lions emblematic of the former Spanish realm of the Asturias, which still stand carved in stone on either side of its main door, and which formerly held over the entrance the stone coat-of-arms of my ancestor.

The house was occupied in the seventeenth century by Don Sancho Alvarez de las Asturias Nava y Moroña, founder in the New World of a widespread family. Don Sancho had on his wedding day prayed God to bless his union with many children, and his petition was heard, for according to the genealogic research made by Don Antonio Asturias a few years ago his descendants reached the total of 3531, the majority living in Guatemala and the rest scattered through Central and South America, Mexico, the United States, and Spain. My own family proudly traces its lineage to him.

Good Don Sancho of the House of the Lions was a very human and romantic person as well as a shrewd businessman and devout leader of Santiago church activities. Back in Spain, before coming to America, he and his two older brothers had all been madly in love with the same señorita. The eldest, who carried the title of Marquis de Nava, married her; another was so heartbroken that he took the vows of a monk, and Don Sancho escaped from memories of his loved one by coming to Guatemala. Here he built the Casa de los Leones, invested wisely the funds he had brought, and married Doña Manuela Bravo de la Cerna, a girl of noble family. The wife of one of his descendants, Elisa Hall de Asturias, a brilliant author, discovered Don Sancho's long neglected memoirs and published selections from them in a book which is priceless for an understanding of life in those ancient days.

The Casa del Capuchino, so called for the towering century-old Capuchino cypress growing in its main patio, has been restored during the present century to its full early splendor. Fine Colonial furnishings have been added, and its patio gardens bloom again as gaily as when Don Luis de las Infantas Mendoza y Viñegas, a great judge sent here by the King of Spain, built the mansion in 1636. I had the pleasure years ago of meeting the charming Mrs. Popenoe, wife of a noted American naturalist, whose deep attachment to Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala led to the restoration of this magnificent ancient building and to its being accessible to the public.

The American writer, Louis Adamic, tells a story in which this famous home of Don Luis de las Infantas is associated with a strange tragedy. A boy of noble family, living in Santiago, fell in love with the beautiful Beatriz, who lived in the present Popenoe House. The father of Beatriz, Don Teofilo de Alvarenga, a royal judge as the founder of the mansion had been before him, did not approve of his daughter's interest in the young man. But the two lovers continued to meet in defiance of parental objections.

One morning the body of the young nobleman was found in some aloe bushes behind the church of San Francisco. He had been stabbed to death. A long search was made, but after some time hopes of finding the murderer waned. Meantime the extraordinary Hermano Pedro, of whom I will have more to tell later on, continued with his usual rounds of the city deep in the night, always tinkling his little bronze bell to exhort the citizens to prayer and repentance. A change in his habits seemed to have come about, however, for he paused a trifle longer than usual as he passed each night in front of the home of Beatriz and her father Don Teofilo. Finally one night the noble judge rushed out horribly agitated and confessed to Hermano Pedro that he had ordered a native to murder his daughter's suitor. Next day Don Teofilo surrendered to the authorities and soon afterwards was hanged, while Beatriz took the veil under the name of Sor Teresa in the convent of Santa Catarina.

Earthquakes had not bothered the illustrious and ever-growing city of Santiago during the first century of its establishment in Panchoy Valley. In 1657 serious tremors alarmed the inhabitants but not sufficiently to discourage further building. As later shocks worried the city, the populace redoubled their efforts to build more securely and to appeal to God and the saints for clemency, in hope that pious deeds and prayers would avert catastrophe.

In spite of all scientific and spiritual efforts, there was a very damaging earthquake in 1717, to which I will refer later in relation to a famous painting. The Fuego volcano erupted, and ash dust from its crater obscured the sun. A sect sprang up in the capital which believed that the end of the world was near. In 1730 a still more damaging quake shook the city. Religious hysteria swept the populace in spite of pacifying efforts by the clergy. A certain woman, Juana Ocaña, prophesied that the city would be wiped out precisely on October 4 of that year. She so worked upon the emotions of the crowd that the Inquisition had her hair cropped short and ordered her to appear in public only in black. These measures did not subdue her gloomy and noisy warnings, so she was locked up in a convent. The best informed and most thoughtful citizens developed into two vigorously opposed camps. The bishop, the orders of nuns and the majority of humbler inhabitants favored abandoning the city for a safer site. The Captain-General, the Dominican and Franciscan monks, the military, and the richer landlords insisted on remaining. The latter body of opinion won the day—for the time being.

Finally in 1773 the most severe earthquakes ever experienced by the city took place at four o'clock one afternoon. Few people were killed because the population had become trained by previous experience to rush into open spaces at the first tremor. But the panic that swept the city and the destruction done to the buildings were frightful. Domestic animals broke loose and roamed the streets bellowing and bleating. The sturdiest walls crashed as if made of powdered sugar. The most disciplined and severely secluded nuns rushed from their palatial cloisters to huddle with a pell-mell of panic-stricken servants and Indians in whatever open space was nearest at hand.

Immersed through its glorious two centuries in a deeply religious atmosphere, the population of Santiago felt and acted for two days in exalted unworldly ways under the conviction that the day of the last judgment was fast approaching. Crowds helped prisoners break from those jails whose walls the earthquake had not already opened up. People who had believed in severe punishment for small infringements on the rights of property frantically sawed away at the chains of escaped convicts. While waiting in long lines to confess themselves to priests and monks among the ruins of the capital's grandiose churches, the residents impatiently bared their sins to their neighbors without regard to rank or race. Shopkeepers refused payment for their wares. Couples who had long loved in secret sin rushed to be married. Rich and noble Spaniards kissed the hands of Indians, servants and laborers whom they had some time wronged or abused. Thieves returned stolen property, admitting their crime publicly. In short, the world that was Santiago, the sixty to seventy thousand Spaniards and *ladinos* and perhaps as many more Negro slaves and Indians of the once quiet capital, lived a while entirely by the Golden Rule.

But as no new tremors appeared and the people found themselves alive and well after two days except for the scarcity of food and water under the chaotic conditions of the wrecked city, their ways returned to "normal." Class barriers rose once more and self-seeking business activities were again undertaken. The blow to vanity and selfishness was short-lived, but there now remained no alternative in the minds of the majority of officials and populace—the city must be abandoned.

In 1775 the leaders began their difficult and heartbreaking migration to a new center, where they built the present capital, Guatemala City. Only some stubborn ones and the poorest and humblest remained, many living day by day as uncertain squatters in the fantastic ruins. Soon vegetable gardens, chickens, pigs, sheep, occupied the vast monasteries. The Jesuits' noble court became later the public market. A soap factory started up in the sacristy of La Recoleccion church. Beautifully sculptured Santa Teresa and Santa Rosa churches became a horse stable and a cow barn. Exuberant vines and flowers quickly set wild roots among huge fallen masses of masonry. The doors of once splendid mansions were cut into kindling wood. Mothers washed clothes and children in the ornate fountains. Life came to resemble the paintings of Rome of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries which depict peasants and peddlers living their humble daily lives among the colossal crumbling monuments of the ancient emperors. For a long time the half-deserted town lived on in a nostalgic secluded peacefulness which to this day not a single damaging earthquake has disturbed.

7

SAINTS AND LOVERS

Antigua

WHEN SHATTERED Santiago was abandoned and became *la Antigua,* meaning "the former capital," ghosts came to share its ruins with the few who lingered on. Legends and myths galore developed around it. The great men and women who had lived here grew to heroic stature. No longer the center of Guatemala's worldly and ecclesiastic rule, Antigua became a mystic power raising men's minds to imaginative heights, exalting the past. It was as if the earthquakes had swept away all that was routine about the city leaving fact and fancy to merge as generations went by. No wonder that so much of Guatemalan literature, so many novels and poems, have been written around Antigua and its now legendary citizens.

Those who stayed when the capital moved thirty-three miles away to the present Guatemala City felt no awe for the vast monuments among which they grazed their cattle, but they had an ever-increasing devotion to Hermano Pedro, the devoted lover of simple humanity, the humblest of old Santiago's great religious leaders, whom I have already referred to in connection with la Casa del Capuchino.

Pedro de San José de Bethancourt was born in the Canary Islands in 1626. Although of a proud family descended from the adventurous Frenchman, Jean de Bethancourt, who had conquered these islands for Spain early in the fifteenth century, he led a simple childhood and was by no means a scholar when he set out at the age of twenty-four for the New World. Hearing men tell of Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala, he became fascinated by the name. He felt intuitively that his destiny was linked with it and for that reason alone he resolutely found his way to the great capital. Pedro was eager to become a monk, and was admitted to the brotherhood of the Jesuits for training. But he realized that memorizing long formal rules and prayers was so far beyond his ability that, discouraged, he wandered away, broken in spirit and convinced that he must seek his destiny elsewhere. As he passed the nearby village of Petapa, he knelt before an image of the Virgin in search of consolation. The statue bent low and whispered to him to return to Santiago. The wooden sculpture is still there, and the Indians say it is bending forward now as on that memorable day.

Obediently Pedro went back to the capital. He noticed how many sufferers were neglected and decided to help them. He came upon an old Negro slave woman, cast out by her master because she was too ill to work. Nursing her back to health, he found that news of his gentleness and sympathy had spread among the poorest inhabitants in the outskirts of the city. Encouraged by this, Pedro became a member of the Third Order of the Franciscans and was charged with taking care of the church of el Calvario. While living in its sacristy he began to cultivate a garden of medicinal herbs which he distributed to all sick people too poor to buy medicines, and planted an *esquizuche* tree which still stands today, so as to supply the natives with its flowers which Indians had told him cured fevers.

Soon afterwards he conceived the idea of starting a small hospital for convalescents. He had observed that many natives after receiving good care in hospitals died because they were unable to look out for themselves while recuperating their strength. News came to him that an old woman had passed away leaving a thatched hut which could be had for a small sum. Brother Pedro begged the money and soon had his own little institution, which the Indians knew affectionately as *la casita del Hermano Pedro*. While many European-born monks and nuns of the white race held themselves loftily above the downtrodden Indians, Negroes, and mixed breeds, Hermano Pedro lived among the poorest classes, emulating the spirit of his beloved Saint Francis of Assisi. He set for himself the task of going through the streets every night, ringing his tiny bronze bell as he advanced, lighting his way with a lantern. It became known to all, rich and poor, that he sought to remind people by his bell to pray for the dead, to consult their conscience and seek forgiveness for their sins. When he came upon someone helpless and in need, he bore him on his back if necessary to his thatched refuge. For this many smilingly referred to him as "the two-legged ambulance." In daytime, he held classes in his hut, teaching Indians to read and write, and opened its doors to all in trouble, never questioning them probingly, ever seeking to console, strengthening by kindly counsel the conscience in each person with whom he had contact.

One afternoon Hermano Pedro sat by his thatched hospital, contemplating the beautiful deep blue sky, brooding on how to get food and medicine for his ever-growing throng of patients and experimenting with the bark of a tree which Indians told him had remarkable curative powers. As he stood there over a pot brewing the bark, a frantic native came up to him. Weeping, the poor man said that his wife was dying and begged Hermano Pedro for medicine and for money so that he and their children could eat. The goodhearted missionary searched in vain in his pockets and the cottage without finding food or coins to give. He implored heaven in prayer for aid in this crisis. A tiny lizard nearby on a sunscorched rock drew his attention. Following a divine inspiration he reached his hand to the little creature which closed its eyes and remained as if lifeless when Hermano Pedro picked it up.

The moment he took it in his hand, the tiny lizard was converted by a magic force into a beautiful jewel, fashioned of emeralds in the same form as the lizard. Dumbfounded, the Indian who had been watching received the precious object and wrapped it in his kerchief carefully. Giving heed to the instructions of Hermano Pedro, he took the jewel to the main dealer of the city who gladly took it in pawn, giving a hundred times the amount the Indian needed for his immediate wants.

As soon as his wife was nursed back to health and his children supplied with food, the man used the remaining money to buy land. He cultivated his plot and built a nice house on it. His family prospered and the time came when he had enough money saved to redeem the jewel. He got it from the jeweler and returned it with the deepest gratitude to Hermano Pedro. The pious brother held the emerald lizard gently in his hand a moment, caressed it and put it back on the same rock where it had been found. Immediately when the little creature felt the heat of the sunny stone, it came back to life, stretched its tiny body and ran off between the cracks of the nearby wall.

The benevolent of the city were following the career of Hermano Pedro with sympathetic curiosity. Every day there was a new miracle told—like that of the lizard; or of someone who had been cured or brought back to life by the supernatural power of the humble missionary, so it was not long before he was able to move his small institution into a fine stone structure. A number of wealthy families arranged to send food on fixed dates to his patients, and to the travelers and needy men who were sheltered by the friendly brother. At Christmas time the children of poor families nearby gathered at his building and he shared in their games and singing, full of a simple down-to-earth joy impregnated with love of God.

No matter how busy he was by day, Hermano Pedro continued year after year to wander the streets at night, ringing his little bell. On one of these nocturnal rambles he met Don Rodrigo de Arias Maldonado, and through their brief encounter the life of this handsome nobleman became ever after associated with the kind friend of the poor.

Don Rodrigo, eleven years younger than Hermano Pedro, was born in Spain of noble family. As a boy he came to the New World with his father who had been appointed governor of Costa Rica. Some time after their arrival, the father died, leaving the youth to govern that province of the realm of Guatemala. Don Rodrigo had inherited a gallant and fearless temperament, and was bursting with the desire to accomplish great things in his life. He undertook the hazardous task of conquering the fierce Indians of the Talamanca region. Successful in this, he received from the king of Spain the title of Marquis of Talamanca.

Rich in wealth and honor, young Don Rodrigo came later to live in Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala, where he soon was one of the most popular figures in a society avid of luxury and amusement. Many beautiful señoritas sought to attract him. But the dashing bachelor paid them scant attention for he had fallen madly and hopelessly in love with none other than Doña Elvira, the wife of the Captain-General of Guatemala. She was half the age of her stern husband and soon felt herself drawn irresistibly to her admirer. The two young people sought to conceal their emotions. Yet in many little ways their passion was indicated to the son of the Captain-General by a former marriage, who also loved his young stepmother and guarded her jealously.

The eternal alertness of her stepson prevented Doña Elvira and Don Rodrigo from ever meeting in private. Only during chance encounters at social gatherings were they able to express their love by a soft pressure of hands or hidden glances.

One day in 1666, the Captain-General was called urgently to make a voyage far from the capital. Preparing to leave, he decided to take along his son who had caused him much trouble by his violent temper and dissolute ways, and might start some new scandal if left behind.

When Doña Elvira heard that her husband and her jealous stepson were going away, she notified Don Rodrigo who was delighted as he had so long hoped to hold in his arms the woman he adored. He was impatiently waiting when she arrived late that night at their prearranged tryst close to her quarters in the Palace of the Captains-General. But so strong was her emotion at their first long burning kiss that she collapsed, and stopped breathing. Don Rodrigo was trying desperately to revive her when he heard the familiar tinkling of Hermano Pedro's bell approaching and rushed to him for help. The two hurried to the lady's side, only to find that the Captain-General's son had eluded his father and had returned just when Don Rodrigo ran off to seek Hermano Pedro. The two rivals drew their swords and were furiously striking at one another when Hermano Pedro stopped them. He had brought Doña Elvira back to life and commanded the two young men to help him take her to her rooms.

So shaken was Don Rodrigo by this near-tragedy and so awed by his love's miraculous return to life through the kind lay brother's efforts, that he forsook worldly affairs, renounced his title of Marquis of Talamanca, and became Hermano Pedro's most ardent assistant, calling himself Fray Rodrigo de la Cruz. Hermano Pedro lay dying a few months later, exhausted by his labors at the age of forty-one. Sensing his end approaching, he named Fray Rodrigo to lead the movement which he had begun. Following plans laid down by Hermano Pedro, Fray Rodrigo and his adherents went ahead with the building of the hospital and church of Belen, which has been converted into a beautiful hotel by its present owner, Ingeniero Rafael Perez de León. Fray Rodrigo de la Cruz also founded the Beaterio de Belen where nuns cared for sick women. Later the organization expanded, with Fray Rodrigo establishing hospitals in Peru and in 1687, twenty years after humble Hermano Pedro's death, the organization won Papal recognition as the Bethlehemite Order.

Today, the simple tomb of Hermano Pedro continues to be visited by large numbers of pilgrims, from the wealthiest to the poorest. The wood-fronted sepulcher in the chapel of the Third Franciscan Order, the only part of the immense Franciscan church still in use, is always beautifully adorned with flowers. On the iron grille before it native worshippers hang small waxen votive images. Candles burn day and night before the shrine. I have always been deeply moved when I have watched Indians enter quietly and bend low in front of the tomb in quest of succor and consolation. They carefully unwrap candles from their colorful scarfs. As they light the candles, they address Hermano Pedro intimately in their own language as if he were a living friend. Their eyes shine with a sincere faith as they glance now at the candles they have offered, now at the tomb. Those burdened with grave troubles cry with great sobs as they tell him their sufferings. Others bring a sick child or relative and point to the sufferer as they appeal to Hermano Pedro to help him. Before leaving they kiss the wooden cover shielding the coffin and knock three times on it to be sure that the ever kind lay brother is still listening to their petitions. Then as they go away they often pause to gesture once more at the candles, telling Hermano Pedro that these will continue to implore his aid after they have left.

As illustrious through his highly intellectual writings as Hermano Pedro de Bethancourt had been before him through kindness to the lowly, was Rafael de Landivar, the first great poet of Central America, who saw the light in Antigua in 1731. As a child he was frail, with a head so large in proportion to his limbs that his wealthy father concluded that his future would be of high intellectual order. Cut off from energetic boyhood activities by poor health, young Landivar watched eagerly the life of city and countryside, the bullfights and festivals, the bustling throngs in the parks and along the shady lanes by the Pensativo river. He spent solitary hours contemplating the great works of Montufar and other famed Santiago artists and sculptors, observing the intricate play of the artistic Santiago fountains, listening avidly to old Guatemalan legends told him by his mulatto nurse-slave Ursula. After graduating from the city's finest school and San Carlos University, he entered the Jesuit order and was only seventeen when he received the degree of Doctor in Theology. He then went to Topozotlan, Mexico, for his novitiate. Ten years later, after he was ordained, he returned to Santiago where he became Director of the Jesuit College of San Francisco de Borja.

Rafael de Landivar was leading a happy peaceful life in the splendid Jesuit cloister, close to his devoted mother, old friends and aged servant Ursula, freed since the death of his father, but still fondly attending the family interests, when unexpectedly, in 1767, an order came to the royal authorities of Guatemala from the King of Spain, commanding the immediate expulsion of all Jesuits and confiscation of their properties. Soldiers promptly surrounded the great Jesuit center in Santiago and Landivar was obliged to embark for Europe without saying good-bye to his mother. After long travels and hardships he settled in Italy where he completed the book-length Latin poem Rusticatio Mexicana which sings the rich story of his homeland's natural beauties, her capital and her quaint native customs in such a noble style that he has earned the title of "the American Virgil."

Hundreds of picturesque characters, noble civic leaders, fine artists and literary figures are found in the story of Antigua. One Captain-General is remembered because he had forty titles and insisted on writing all of them after his name each time he signed a document. He had prepared a tomb for himself in one of the chapels of the Cathedral, but it was to remain empty because he and all his family were drowned in a shipwreck during a trip to Spain. Another lives in present-day memories because he was so honest. So very honest in fact, that when his body was disinterred many years after his death the grave diggers found the glow worms had destroyed everything except his hands, which remained as clean as when he was alive! Still another Captain-General is noted for his kindness—he gave permission to the Indians to ride on horseback and to raise their own cattle—and there was one Captain-General who became famous through an incident which occurred much against his wishes as he disembarked on Guatemalan soil. The commander of the port, wishing to gain his favor, had prepared a grandiose reception for him, but neglected to have enough soldiers to guard him. Pirates, who must have heard that the Captain-General was bringing with him a large sum of money, attacked the port that night and stole over two hundred thousand *pesos* which he was going to invest in business at Santiago. Father Ximenez, who later discovered and translated the Popol-Buj, had made the trip from Spain with the robbed Captain-General and wrote an amusing account of this adventure.

The great historian of the early days of Guatemala, Bernal Diaz del Castillo, resided almost all his life in Santiago and was buried in its cathedral. He boasted of having taken part in one hundred and nineteen battles and told of them in his True History of the Conquest of New Spain (Mexico) which he finished in 1568, the first and most reliable record of the acquisition of Central America and Mexico by Spain.

The great historian was much beloved by the people of Santiago. He was given many honors and a municipal position but was particularly proud of having been chosen twice to carry the royal banner of the *conquistadores* in procession. From his fighting days he had acquired the Indian habit of sleeping on the ground and continued this "shocking custom" through his life. Still another eccentricity of his disturbed his fellow dignitaries so careful of tradition and protocol—each night before going to sleep he took a walk without wearing a hat.

In the seventeenth century Don Francisco Antonio de Fuentes y Guzman, a great-grandson of Diaz del Castillo, wrote another interesting record about Guatemala, the *Recordación Florida,* from which I have taken many of the present book's descriptions of the early capitals, primitive Indian ways, and of the animals and plants that struck the colonists of his day as strange and intriguing. Fuentes y Guzman was born in Santiago and occupied a number of distinguished official positions which led to his traveling in and studying many regions of Guatemala.

While Diaz del Castillo had told of the triumphs of the *conquistadores,* a courageous writer and missionary, Fray Antonio Remesal, who studied Guatemala's history during six years spent in the Dominican monastery of Santiago, stressed the Spaniards' cruelties and abuse of the Indians. His books, of which the best known was written in the second decade of the seventeenth century, bitterly attacked the reputation of the early Spanish leaders, and even dared to criticize Doña Beatriz the Unfortunate One. Descendants of the *conquistadores* whom he revealed in such a humiliating and inglorious light had him imprisoned on his return from Spain where he had gone to publish his book. When he fell gravely ill in his cell, the head of the Santiago Inquisition under whose vigilance he was being kept for questioning, had a hole dug in the nearby pasture where mules were wont to graze. The moment the friar died, his body was thrown into the hole.

Among the strange episodes that the unorthodox Remesal narrates is a weird tale concerning a sorcerer related to Bishop Marroquin. Soon after the capital had been transferred from the present Ciudad Vieja to Santiago, so Remesal's story goes, the citizens were mystified by the disappearance of the daughter of one of the *conquistadores*. Somebody reported having seen her flying in the arms of a man through the sky toward the crater of Agua Volcano. Her grieving family had masses said for her safe return. The city was thoroughly searched in vain. One afternoon as Bishop Marroquin was preaching in the cathedral, a slip of paper came floating through a window. It had been written by the girl, and told that she had been in the crater of the volcano where a young man unknown to her had taken her; she expressed the fear that he intended to kill her. An expedition of soldiers and courageous citizens was quickly organized to climb Agua Volcano, whose summit had never been reached by any Spaniard and was a subject of material and mystic fears. But the bedeviled abductor returned her to her home that same evening and the expedition never took place. Anxiety of what the sorcerer might do next spread through the city. To reassure the public the religious authorities called all young men of the capital together in an effort to identify the criminal. One by one they were brought before the girl. She recognized Don Francisco del Valle Marroquin, kin of the illustrious bishop of Guatemala, as her abductor. In a fury the young man drew a dagger from under his red cape and struck at her but was seized in time and imprisoned. Culprits who shared his cell during the time he spent in jail reported that he transformed himself at will into a tiger, a pig or any other animal—but apparently he could not turn himself into a bird able to escape through the bars.

Quirio Cataño, of Portuguese parentage, was the first of the great sculptors of Santiago. Like the chief painters of those times, he devoted his talent to religious subjects and was famed particularly for his unrivaled skill in portraying Christ Crucified with a deeply emotional and realistic appearance of death. His finest carving, *el Cristo del Perdon,* is still in Antigua's cathedral. Another sculptor, Alonso de Paz, born in Santiago, is famous today for his Mary Magdalene, now in Guatemala City, for which his exceptionally beautiful wife posed, and The Nazarene in Antigua's La Merced church. A third renowned sculptor, Juan de Aguirre, came to Santiago from Peru, fleeing the persecution of the Inquisition there. Soon after his arrival he fell in love with a señorita of the nobility, but her proud, rich father opposed their marriage. This caused Juan such sorrow that he left the world, entering the monastery of San Francisco where he developed his talent for sculpture.

Don Antonio de Montufar was the most esteemed painter in Santiago in the middle of the seventeenth century. While working for the church of El Calvario on a series of large canvases telling the story of Christ's Passion, he had a strange presentiment that something tragic would befall him as soon as he completed these pictures. For this he delayed fulfilling his contract for two years but was finally chided by his friends into finishing the task. The unveiling of the immense pictures in the church was accompanied by a brilliant function at which Don Antonio was highly praised by the best art critics and religious leaders of the land, but as he was leaving, he was struck blind.

Thomas de Merlo, who took the unfortunate Don Antonio's place in the early eighteenth century as the finest painter of the art-conscious capital is celebrated for his "Saint Nicholas received by Emperor Constantine," a work completed a few months before he died at the age of ninety, and now kept in the Colonial Museum of Antigua. De Merlo's best pupil was José Valladares, who left wonderful paintings and in turn guided Juan José Rosales, another of our best known artists.

Francisco Villapando, called the prince of the Guatemalan painters of his time, showed his talent even when a child. As a youth he fell in love with the pretty daughter of one of the city's most distinguished men. To win her affection he determined to gain fame as an artist and went to Spain to complete his studies. But when he returned he found the girl had been married off by her family to someone else. Broken-hearted, he wished to become a monk. His family dissuaded him from this step but, completely disillusioned with society, he devoted the rest of his life to solitary work on his forty-five enormous canvases. He never allowed anyone to enter his studio and was accompanied only by his parrot and a pet monkey.

Originally, the vast Franciscan church contained these canvases many of which dealt with the life of Saint Francis. Of his exceptionally large paintings, the one which is considered his masterpiece gives a dramatic vision of the church as it used to be at its prime. The canvas depicts a scene within the Franciscan church following the momentous earthquake of 1717. Half a century earlier the historic statue of the Virgin of Loreto which stood in a chapel of this church had turned its head to one side. This miracle led to increased veneration of the image and to its being transferred to the main altar. The statue came to be associated in the minds of the citizens with their dread of earthquakes and by 1717 it was customary to pray to this Virgin for intercession whenever there were serious tremors. The painting shows just such a scene: the terror-stricken but always dignified community leaders are shown clustering near the Virgin's image in the church. Some are confessing to Franciscan friars. Others are praying for forgiveness, convinced that the earthquake of 1717 which seriously damaged the city—while leaving the church of the Franciscans virtually untouched, was God's way of punishing their sins.

The celebrations that took place when the sculpture of the Nazarene by Evaristo Zuñiga, another great artist, was unveiled and blessed, gives one some idea of the city's glory. While the bishop was consecrating the splendid carving, which can be seen nowadays in Guatemala City, five companies of infantry stationed near the church fired volleys in salute, and all the six hundred bells of Santiago's churches and monasteries were set ringing. That afternoon there was the *paseo* that inevitably accompanied any exciting event in the old capital, with the nobles displaying their finest costumes and with two allegorical chariots passing through the streets. First came the cart bearing seven huge globes representing planets. On each "planet" sat a girl dressed to symbolize one of the virtues. In the second cart were seven boys with heads bent submissively, impersonating the main vices, conquered by the seven virtues.

The love the inhabitants of Santiago had for their beautiful religious art treasures led to many sad scenes when the secular and ecclesiastical capital and so many of the finest works of art were transferred to Guatemala City after the earthquake of 1773. In one case an amusing ruse was resorted to by a priest of the church of El Calvario to prevent the removal of its particularly venerated Virgin de Dolores. Under the wide, heavily embroidered silk skirts in which the sculpture was robed, he attached rocks and iron bars. When the porters came to remove it they found the statue so heavy that they abandoned the task as hopeless. Rumors spread that this had happened because the Virgin wanted to remain in her old church.

Of the many women who graced the charming social life of old Santiago and made the culture and good works of its convents famous, none are so memorable as Sor Berengaria and Sor Juana de Maldonado. Sister Berengaria served in the convent of Santa Clara. She was highly educated but deliberately chose to work at the lowliest job in the kitchen, humbling herself in this life so as to help others and to perfect her soul for the life to come.

When the mother superior of her convent died, all its nuns foregathered one evening in the church to select a successor by secret ballot. Finding it hard to choose from among their friends, some voted for the simple little scullery maid, Sor Berengaria, thinking it would be a great joke for her to have received one ballot in her favor. Others did the same because they pitied her and thought the futile gesture would be a kind deed. To the nuns' consternation, when the votes were counted it was found that Sor Berengaria was unanimously elected to rule over them. They were indignant at the prospect and had determined to vote all over again when the trap door leading to the burial crypt below opened and the ghosts of seven nuns joined the assembly, silently bearing ballots in favor of Sor Berengaria. The humble little kitchen servant was promptly accepted as the mother superior of the great convent of Santa Clara, a post in which she fully justified the judgment of the seven ghosts. This curious anecdote is narrated in small letters at one side of a painting representing Sor Berengaria which is today in the Colonial Museum of Antigua.

Doña Juana de Maldonado was the only daughter of one of the richest of the noblemen who lived royally in Santiago in the early seventeenth century. Two years after her birth, her mother died and the father devoted himself to raising his one child with all the advantages that wealth and culture could offer. As a young girl, her well cultivated intelligence, her startling beauty and charming personality made her the most admired señorita of Santiago. She was not yet fifteen when distinguished young men of the country began serenading her, seeking to win her love. Until her twentieth birthday, however, she rejected all suitors. Then, as usual on that occasion, her father gave a party in his lovely residence with all the pomp and magnificence which the old center of Guatemalan society loved to display at the slightest pretext.

A young man, Don Santiago de Cordoba, just arrived from Mexico, was among those attending the party. Don Santiago was ten years older than Doña Juana. He had piercing gray eyes with a strangely magnetic quality, was attractive, witty and reputed to be a daring swordsman.

But he also was notoriously fond of gambling, drinking and of amorous adventures. At the celebration in the Maldonado home he quickly became interested in his young hostess and courted her assiduously. To the consternation of her father and friends, she soon fell in love with the newcomer, even though she had already heard through the busy gossips of the closely knit city all about his escapades and ill repute. Reports of almost daily fights caused by his failure to pay gambling debts, of duels with husbands whose wives he had wooed, failed to cool her interest in him. Her dismayed father entreated her to forget him, but always she answered, "That is only possible if you cut out my heart."

Months of anguish for the Maldonados followed. Her father continued to hope against hope that Juana would realize what kind of man her libertine Don Santiago was. But nothing discouraged her and, when sorrow and tribulations finally caused her to become seriously ill, his affection overcame his misgivings and he at last consented to receive in his home once more the man he despised. Kneeling before Doña Juana and her father, Don Santiago swore three times by the cross on the hilt of his sword that he was repentant of the wrongs he had committed and that he would devote himself ever after to meriting the love of Doña Juana whose hand he begged in marriage. Preparations were made for an elaborate celebration when the engagement of the two lovers would be officially announced. Doña Juana regained her former good spirits and Don Santiago, humble and passionate, appeared to have forsaken his evil companions. Yet, suddenly on the very day of the engagement festivities, Doña Juana learned that he had vanished in the direction of Mexico the night before, accompanied by an attractive young matron of high rank.

The blow crushed the girl. She shut herself in her rooms, refused to receive her closest friends, and finally resolved to enter the convent of La Concepcion as a nun. Her father, fearing that Don Santiago might return once again, consented. As he had exceptional influence he was able to secure for her many privileges not permitted other nuns in any of the sumptuous religious institutions of Santiago. Fabulous sums were spent on making her special quarters in the convent as splendid as the finest she could have hoped to occupy through marrying a great dignitary. Half a dozen Negro slave girls were there to attend her wishes. Although the convent proper, housing a thousand women, was the best equipped in the city, the private suite of rooms for her was still finer. She had a lovely patio with many flowers and a pretty fountain in the center where she sat to write poetry, which was considered the finest of her day. Her father also built for her a private chapel which was hung with the richest tapestries, adorned with costly vases and with a remarkable series of religious pictures on brass set in ebony frames with corners of gold and silver, bought for her in Italy. The chapel had a small organ and many musical instruments for Sor Juana had a remarkable talent for music as well as poetry and painting.

In this fabulous setting—about which a visiting English monk wrote sarcastically, remarking that it seemed most unbecoming to a woman who had taken the vows of poverty and humility—Sor Juana de Maldonado held court, entertaining the Bishop and other high ecclesiastics, her relatives and old acquaintances. She and nuns whom she took a personal liking to, organized a little orchestra to play for the visitors. Her conversation and poetry were most delightful—in fact, so impressed with her personality and intellect was the Bishop of Guatemala that he made a serious but bitterly rejected attempt to have her named mother superior of the convent over the heads of older and more experienced nuns.

Years went by peacefully until, one day in 1628, news reached the religious circles in Santiago that Fray Angelo Maria, Bishop of Myra, was arriving as an emissary of the Pope to inspect the institutions of the Catholic orders in Central America. Many were suspicious of the newcomer as they had never heard of Myra but his identifying papers seemed in order and the monasteries and convents of the city went ahead preparing extravagantly for his reception. The speech of welcome to the convent of La Concepcion was entrusted to its most cultured nun, Sor Juana.

On the day appointed, the visitor came to the convent and Sor Juana advanced to deliver her address of welcome. As she looked into the gray piercing eyes of Fray Angelo Maria, her voice, usually so confident, faltered. She became frightfully pale, tottered and collapsed. Sor Juana was borne by the nuns to her bedroom and the mother superior carried on the entertainment as if nothing serious had occurred. Of the hundreds present that day, only Sor Juana had recognized the bishop of Myra as the lover who had abandoned her twenty years before. It must have been quite difficult to identify the svelte, elegant and attractive young man who had fled away unexpectedly with this corpulent bald-headed man, walking solemnly, dressed in a long purple soutane and skull cap.

The movements of the "Bishop of Myra" aroused suspicion and were investigated when he suddenly left the capital after the encounter with Sor Juana and, according to one of our most brilliant modern historians, he was eventually condemned to severe punishment by the Mexican Inquisition as an impostor.

Beautiful, talented Sor Juana never recovered from her shock at the reappearance of her Don Santiago and she wasted away, dying when she was only forty years old.

8

GHOSTS ON A COFFEE PLANTATION

Retana

Near the City of Antigua is the widely known *finca* of Retana, thus called for the settler who established it centuries ago. Quite often our family used to go to this favorite coffee plantation of my father to spend the weekends. It was delightful to arrive at Retana at the hour when the mysterious veil of twilight blended the real and the unreal, leading one's thoughts inevitably toward the romantic and fantastic. The setting sun bathed the lovely scenery of the high plateau, over which towered the jungle-clad Volcan de Agua, tinted a mauve-rose never found elsewhere. This beautiful volcano often appears in the twilight as if cut in two by a single serpent-shaped cloud that mounts guard over the myth-inspiring peak through the night. Just so did the Volcan de Agua look from Retana on one well-remembered day as I arrived from Guatemala City for a visit.

The great bronze bell of the mansion was still ringing its welcome as I separated from my family and went for a stroll. Such bells as that of Retana dominate life on the plantations of Guatemala. They call the farmhands to work, announce their meals and greet owners and guests. And always they ring with a clear meaningful resonance that conveys a message better than does a worded song.

As I wandered about, the vivid colors of the volcano and its silvery guardian cloud faded gradually into the dark while a huge moon began to rise from behind distant mountains. In this enigmatic half-light, fragments of the old folktales of Guatemala came back to me, making me forget the club dance I had been to the previous night, and the drive in the swift car that had brought me here from the up-to-date capital.

In my stroll I had reached the coffee bushes, over which alligator pear trees curve maternally to protect them from wind and frost, when I encountered Tata Tun, the aged gardener, unofficial patriarch of the fifty Indian families who have lived here and served the plantation for generations. I was overjoyed to see him and asked where he was going.

"To feed the swans and ducks in the lake," he answered with a quaint old-time reverence. "Will you come with me, señorita?"

I promptly joined him, for Tata Tun was wise in the ways of Guatemala plantation life and a storehouse of native folklore.

As we walked through the coffee plants toward the lake, I asked him if he knew the stories about the mischievous spirit called El Sombreron, "Big Hat," who haunts so many Guatemalan legends. It is the Sombreron who tangles the manes of horses so that you never can comb them out again. He sometimes runs up the side of your wall and, crouching in a dark corner of the ceiling, throws sand down on you. And it is he who gallops high on the neck of a horse late in the night, though of course invisible except to those of simple faith.

The Indian smiled and began by reminding me how the

Sombreron came to be an immortal gnome. He was one of twin boys born to a poor hat-maker of Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala, the old capital. His brother was quiet and good and grew up to be such a decent citizen that the world has heard nothing of him at all. But this little fellow was mischief incarnate. He stole candy, food, money —anything he could lay his hands on. His family lived in constant fear of what he would do next and saw that at the rate the child was going, he would grow up to be a notorious criminal.

A friend of the family was consulted, one of the famous *brujos* whose magic for good and evil was inherited from the ancient Maya. The sorcerer directed the hatter to make a very large sombrero which, when finished, should be brought to him. The sorcerer worked a spell over it, and told the father to leave the sombrero on the floor of his shop so that the boy would be likely to hide under it if pursued while repeating his raids on his father's cash box.

Sure enough, that very night the hatter heard suspicious noises in his store. Hurrying there from his sleeping quarters, he discovered the cash box empty again. As he looked around, suspecting his son, he noticed that the big hat was moving. He tried to lift it but had some difficulty because it was very heavy for a hat. When he finally managed to turn it over, there was the mischievous boy! The big hat was stuck to the child's head where, by the spell the sorcerer had cast, it would always remain. The spell also kept the boy from ever growing. So he has gone about ever since, century after century, a midget wearing an immense hat.

The Sombreron is known for his amorous as well as other escapades. He is constantly falling in love with some unwilling and terrified girl. The first of his many sweethearts was the only daughter of a widowed washerwoman. The poor mother was appalled to find the comical looking gnome with an evil reputation visiting her home night after night. She barred her door but he trotted up the high wall and in through a window. When door and windows were well locked, his magic powers opened a way for him through the wall. Indeed, he not only can come through stone walls but can even peep into the mind of whoever interests him.

The washerwoman at last went to ask the advice of a priest. He agreed with her that the Sombreron was not a very desirable prospective son-in-law and suggested that the safest thing for her to do was to move to a far-off village.

The distraught mother did not tell her plan to her daughter, whose sentiments toward the Sombreron were not as clearly defined as her own. The girl might have given him a hint of what was afoot. So the woman secretly made arrangements for moving with a friend who owned a cart. The flight was set for the early morning, since at that hour ghosts must stay in the other world. Even the clever Sombreron has to limit his adventures to the night.

Next morning the carter picked up the woman, her daughter and their belongings. They traveled for a whole week in the cart drawn by strong oxen and at last reached their new home. That evening, as the woman and the girl were arranging their furniture, the mother suddenly burst into lamentations over forgetting the *olla* or huge pot in which she was accustomed to prepare her *tamales.*

The daughter made no comment and kept on cleaning, but a strange mocking voice called to the mother from the courtyard. Rushing out, the woman saw her *olla* there before her, safe and sound. She lifted it up and who was underneath but the Sombreron!

"When I found you'd forgotten this, I brought it here myself," he said gallantly.

Tata Tun ended the story with a boisterous laugh, then turned to the small coffee plants among which we were passing. He indicated the nurseries in which were growing the tiny seedlings nicknamed "little lettuces," and the larger seedlings called "three crosses" because the twigs at this second stage look like that. After this, they are ready for a final transplanting to the alleys where they will grow to maturity, beginning to produce five years later. The old gardener told me how, some seventy years before, the culture of coffee had come to supplant cochineal as the main export product of these highland plains.

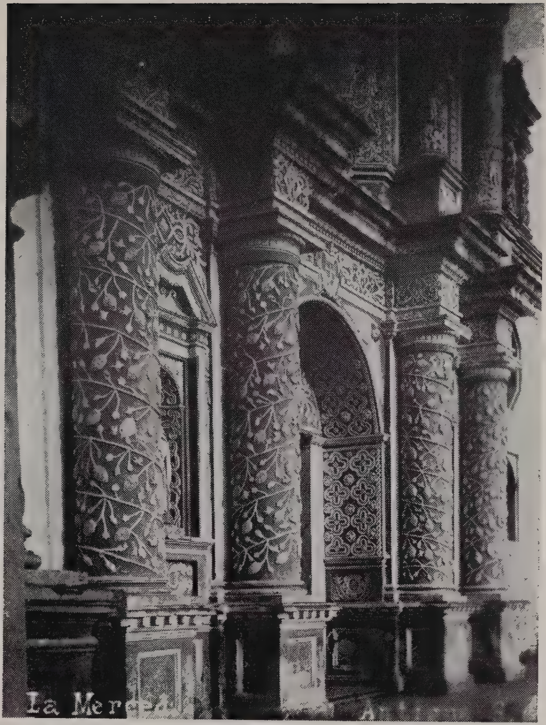
"Cochineal," he explained, "is an insect. From the females a red dye is obtained which was in great demand before the discovery of artificial dyes. In the old days, the cochineal flourished marvelously here in Guatemala on our nopal cactus."

In his youth, Tata Tun had shared in the struggle to adapt coffee culture to this five-thousand-foot plateau whose volcanic soil is so rich, but where frost can kill the delicate coffee shrub. Many trees, including the Australian eucalyptus, were tried through the years as living shields for the coffee plants against wind and cold. At last the native avocado tree was found just right for the job.

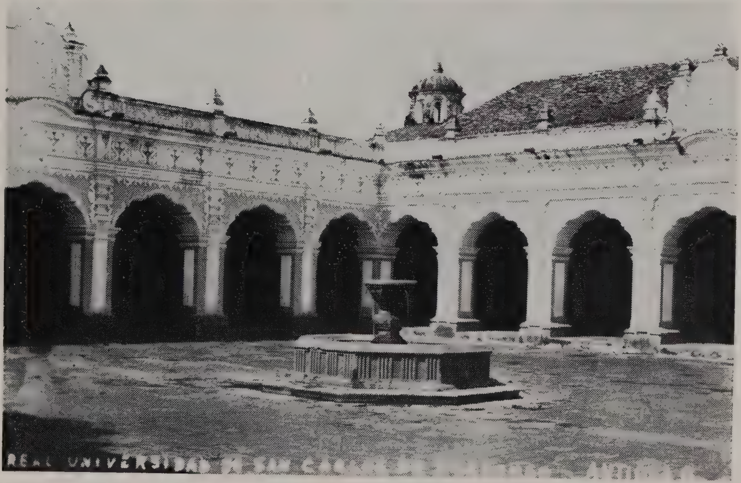
Suddenly I recoiled as I heard the rustle of some creature moving close to me under dry leaves.

"Was it a snake, Tata Tun?" I asked apprehensively.

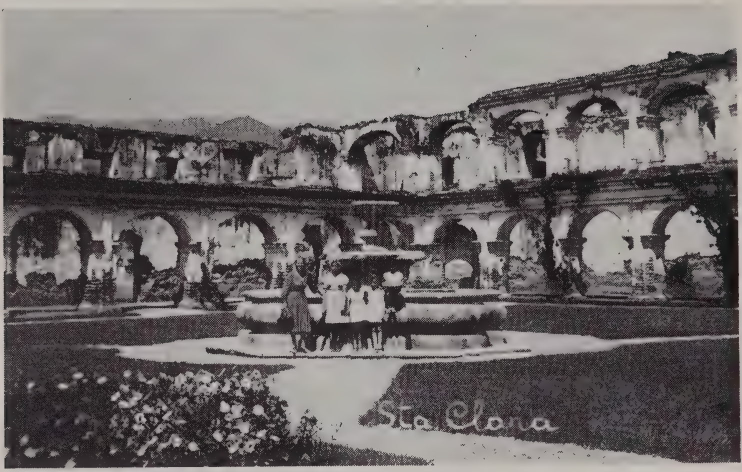
"Yes, señorita. You nearly stepped on it. Snakes are numerous on the plantations. Although these trees stay al-



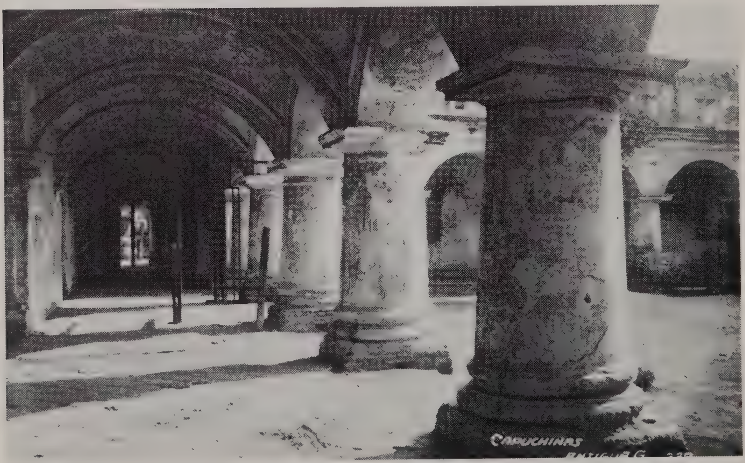
Façade of the church of La Merced, Antigua.


REAL UNIVERSIDAD

Patio of the Real Universidad de San Carlos Borromeo, Antigua, where the Museo Colonial is today.



Ruins of the convent of Santa Clara, Antigua.


CAPUCHINAS

Ruins of the convent of Capuchinas, Antigua. The door at the end of the arcade leads to the ruined church.

ways green, they are constantly shedding dead leaves which form a thick blanket underfoot in all seasons and reptiles hide there easily. They are not poisonous, but all the same I mistrust all snakes. They are as evil as the one that tempted Eve. Do you know what happened the other day at the cottage of Rafael Guerra, the farmer who lives near the bridge?"

"No. Remember I've just arrived."

"Well, he and la Paca have been married ten years and although they had five children, all five were girls. Then, some months ago, a sixth child was born, a boy. They were extremely happy to have a son at last. The baby was fine and strong, yet about a month ago he began looking pale and grew thinner and weaker every day. Lately the baby could hardly cry, and we all thought he had not long to live. Poor Rafael was in despair. He was sure that the curse of an evil spirit was sapping his child's strength.

"To drown his sorrow, he went every afternoon after work to a bar in the nearby village, and drank *aguardiente,* our strong local brandy. Last Monday night he came home later than usual. Fearing that his wife would scold him for spending his small earnings on drink, he crept silently into the hut, undressed in the dark, and gently lay down in the double bed. He was startled to feel against him a cold slimy body. Quickly he jumped down, lit a candle and pulled off the blanket that had covered his sleeping wife and the dying child who nestled beside her. Horrified, he saw a snake nursing at her breast. And the baby boy was suckling the tip of the snake's tail. The diabolical being had put its tail in the baby's mouth to prevent him from crying.

"Trembling with fear and disgust, Rafael shouted to his wife. Half awake, she sprang instinctively to the opposite side of the bed, holding the baby to her. The snake crawled from the bed, slithering past Rafael toward the hole by which no doubt it had been entering the hut every night and taking the nourishment from the child. But the infuriated father grabbed his long heavy *machete* knife and hacked the serpent to pieces.

"And did the child die?"

"No, he is much better now. Rafael struts about like a victorious Saint George. He is positive the reptile was an evil spirit."

"Do you yourself believe in spirits, Tata Tun?"

"Certainly, señorita. I have seen and heard them. Take for instance that ghostly woman, La Llorona. Often I have heard her midnight crying, the saddest sound in the world."

By now we had reached the small lake, my favorite spot on the plantation. Lotus blooms of various colors floated on its surface. Classic, palace-garden swans and many species of duck began to swim toward us, seeking the food cast by Tata Tun. They made ripples that flashed like silver simitars in the diamond-blue moonlight. The scene was so beautiful that we stopped chatting and sat in the grass beside the water.

But as I was under the witching spell that always descended on me when wandering about in the twilights and nights of Retana, I soon asked the aged story-teller, "What were you saying about La Llorona, Tata Tun?"

Eagerly the Indian began to relate the ancient Guatemalan legend of the Weeping Woman in which our countryfolk still firmly believe.

In the early days of the Conquistadores, before the time of Pocahontas, before Rip Van Winkle left Sleepy Hollow, a very young and pretty girl of the Guatemalan aristocracy was given in marriage to a rich old man. He was as tyrannical as he was wealthy. He was madly in love with his little bride and insanely jealous.

To have her all to himself he took her away from everyone she knew. In his imposing single-story stone mansion in Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala, the capital at that time, he walled her about against the world. Strong locks were put on the windows so that she could not even talk with anyone in the street. A tall gate barred with iron was erected at the entrance, and the old master kept all the keys to the estate hanging from his neck on a gold chain. He surrounded his bride with taciturn old native women servants. The only man about the place was an aged butler nicknamed "the nightmare" by his fellow Indians because of his ugly appearance.

To console his adorable and adored wife for her loneliness, the master overwhelmed her with dazzling presents. But she received these with the utmost indifference, as she did the crude affection of the old husband himself.

Life would have been intolerable for her if she had not taken a great interest in her husband's little nephew, whose piteous condition touched her deeply. The uncle paid no attention to the boy, deprived him of toys, candy, books, and gave him no freedom to play with other children. Though a member of the family, the child was relegated to the garden behind the mansion, and slept there in a tawdry thatched hut. His food, like that of the dogs, was of scraps from the master's table.

Every day the husband rode off on horseback to superintend the work on his cochineal plantation. As soon as he was out of hearing, the girl-wife ran to the child, bringing him dainties, entertaining him with stories. She even taught him to read and write. So each day passed until the sound of hoofs warned them of the return of the old man.

This went on for some time, but the day came when the husband was obliged to travel to Spain on business which he expected would keep him away only a few months. As year after year passed, and there was no news of him, rumors spread that he had been drowned in a shipwreck or had been killed by one of the English pirate bands who harassed the Spanish Main in those times. At such a prospect, his entire household felt quite agitated, but not by grief.

The little nephew had meanwhile become a man. The attachment between him and his uncle's youthful wife grew to a passionate love. When a healthy, pretty child was born to them, the young man went to seek work in a far-off place where the three could live safe from his cruel uncle were the old man ever to return.

Only a few days after the lover departed, word came that the husband was arriving. Desperately, the mother looked for somebody to keep the child for her. But although many felt in sympathy with her, they feared the enmity of the fiercely jealous master and dared not help her.

Frantic and half crazed with terror, the young woman rushed to the nearby river and drowned her child. When she saw its lifeless body floating away from her she began to cry wildly.

She cried on, day and night without stopping, and at last she died of grief. But her spirit continued on earth through the centuries, condemned to cry forever as it wanders along the banks of rivers searching for the lost baby.

I had heard of this anguished weeping ghost, La Llorona, since the days when my nurse used to tell me such stories. I had heard Indians declare in a matter-of-fact way that they sometimes recognized the moans and sobs of La Llorona as they lay awake at night. Yet the aged gardener was able to evoke greater pity and fear than I had ever felt before. The old legends of Guatemala live on in our modern skeptical world because of the conviction with which they still are interpreted by the native countryfolk.

As if to make doubly sure that I should believe the story of La Llorona, a far-off sound of moaning came from the direction of the river. In a characteristic Indian gesture, Tata Tun raised his right hand to warn me not to speak, and cupped his left hand behind his ear in order to hear better.

He murmured, "Listen to her, señorita."

I struggled to resist believing in the sad voice my ears were hearing. Anxious to shake off the obsessive weeping ghost, I asked Tata Tun to tell me a folk tale that would not be so tragic.

So he told of La Siguanaba, a beautiful lady of long ago, who had many lovers, one after the other. Each lover showered her with compliments and assurances of his adoration, and each in turn she killed. She found it unbearable to hear how much she was loved.

As a punishment for her murders, La Siguanaba is condemned to wander about as a spirit forever until she finds a man who will turn his face away from her when he sees her bathing. On clear nights she goes to bathe by the shores of lakes and rivers. She wears a transparent white gown, and pours water over herself from a silver vessel that glistens in the moonlight. Then she stands there combing her long blond hair, but she never can untangle the hair because her comb is made of Lucifer's stiff bristles.

"I myself have seen La Siguanaba several times," Tata Tun assured me, "And," he added, rubbing his palms together sensuously, "I have never been able to turn my head away until she finally disappears. Up to now, no man has been able to liberate her spirit by turning his eyes away, and. . . ."

His phrase was unfinished as he stared tongue-tied beyond me. A white-robed figure was approaching us along the dark alley of poplars that leads from the house to the lake.

"Look, señorita, there she is," he stuttered.

"Who, Tata Tun?" I whispered, my heart beating faster.

"It is La Siguanaba coming to bathe in the lake as she often does," the old man answered. He jumped up and stood in front to protect me from the ghost. He had picked up a twig. Breaking it in two he held the pieces so that they formed a cross. Pointing this holy symbol of exorcism at the silent, approaching figure he cried, "Stop in the name of God, Siguanaba!"

But the white figure continued advancing. "Why, Tata Tun!" it laughed. "I am only Chon, the cook. It is time for the señorita to come in. Supper is ready."

I hurried with Chon and Tata Tun to the Retana mansion. I was still nervous, ready to jump away if a ghost should approach, as I crossed the big patio, but once in the brightly lighted arcade I felt securely within the world of reality. I could not resist pausing there to admire the lovely orchids planted in large pots. They had been brought by Indians to my mother from the jungles of Agua Volcano and were now in full bloom. On the opposite side of the tiled passage, swinging by almost invisible wires from the arches of the old-style Spanish house, were baskets full of moss where grew pretty and queer plants which we name *colas de quetzal* because their long narrow curving stems resemble the tail plumes of the green quetzal bird. Also hanging between the arches were cages of canaries and many other species of native birds, for my father made a hobby of collecting the rarer songsters of Guatemala. Their twitterings filled the house with gay melodies.

As I reached the dining room where my family were patiently waiting for me before beginning the evening meal, my mother smilingly asked where I had been.

"At the lake helping Tata Tun feed the swans and listening to some of his creepy ghost stories," I answered. Concealing my own moments of credulity, I added, "It is curious how strongly convinced the Indians are that ghosts exist."

"The coming of electric lights has been devastating among the good old ghosts—or so I thought!" laughed my brother Jorge.

During dinner, Jorge brought up the subject of superstitions again. "You are right, Lily. Even though modern ways are reducing the number of those who believe in beings one cannot see in broad daylight, the Indians generally cling to many primitive beliefs, some charming, others injurious to the progress of science. Before setting out on a hunt, it is still customary for Indians to pray to the god of forests and hills to grant them some of the animals under the god's jurisdiction. And all through the night prior to the planting of corn, the Indian prays and watches before his hut's tiny shrine, where candles burn and the seed grain is placed for that occasion.

"Indians have told me," Jorge went on, "that when they go bathing in a river, they perform rites to conciliate the evil spirits that dwell under water and would otherwise drag the bathers down and drown them. Many have I heard who dread bats and black butterflies, believing that if one of these should enter their hut while a member of the family is ill, the sick person will surely die and they even go ahead in preparing the funeral if a black butterfly or a bat comes into his room, or if an owl is heard hooting outside. Too, if a sick Indian hears a dog howling, he thinks the dog is seeing some of his dead friends whose spirits have come to conduct him into the next world."

"Some of their ideas, they say, have developed from their own experiences and I don't believe can be disproved," suggested my brother Carlos. "Indians insist that bees will not stay in a hive built in the eaves of a house unless the family within the house observes the friendliest relations. If members of the family quarrel, the bees go elsewhere and start another hive. Thanks to this rather pleasant superstition, many a hard-pressed Indian has controlled his otherwise nasty temper. They also have the custom of feeding their hunting dogs tortillas and hot peppers which are said to sharpen their sense of smell."

My youngest brother Arturo laughed self-consciously, probably for fear that we might think him credulous. "I too, have heard similar stories from my old Indian nurse. She says that her people have found the ideal 'insecticide.' Simply gather up a few of the ants or other vermin you wish to get rid of, put them in a paper bag and carry the bag a distance from your home. Put it on the ground and command the insects to call for those which were left in the kitchen. By the time you get back to the house, they have mostly disappeared, no doubt to join their friends."

"It is sad in church sometimes," commented my mother, "to see how perturbed an Indian worshipper becomes if the candle he lights before a saintly image flickers and sputters. If his candle does not burn clear and bright, he believes the saint is refusing to grant the request for which he has come to pray."

Then Carlos added that he knew better than to call on an Indian to repay a loan after sundown, because of the widespread belief that to do so would bring bad luck in business. Many were the instances of current superstitions brought up during our dinner by one or other of the family, some of them truly charming, such as the Indian belief that rainbows are caused by the breath of a goddess who dwells in the high mountains, and the taboo forbidding one to step on grains of corn since they are virtually human and will cry if mistreated.

Toward the end of the delicious supper which Chon had cleverly prepared so that those of us who delighted in native dishes were as content as those attached to the foods of France and the United States where all of us had lived many years, my father announced that he too had a story of superstitions to tell. "But this time," he smiled, "the victim of credulity was a Spaniard."

His tale, my father explained, went back to the early days of Guatemala's independence from Spain. Exalted by our national freedom, and guided by the old good-hearted senator, Dr. Simon Cañas, our leaders decreed the liberation of all Negro and Indian slaves in the land—a decision reached in 1824, years before Great Britain, the United

States or any other great nation had freed the bondsmen in their territories.

Many Spanish settlers in Guatemala in those days were quite as superstitious as the Indians. According to my father's folk-tale, one of these Spanish farmers was in despair at the news of the coming emancipation. Without his thirty slaves he did not see how he could continue to cultivate his plantation, unless he would have some mules to help. So he went to consult the famous native sorcerer, Diego Pocon. Diego was reputedly familiar with the magic of his Mayan ancestors. He boasted that he could transform human beings into animals, trees or stones.

The Spaniard offered the *brujo* thirty silver pesos if he would change the thirty slaves into as many mules before the day of Emancipation. In reply the sorcerer assured the farmer that transforming men into donkeys or mules was the easiest of his tricks. It was arranged that the Spaniard should bring the slaves to Diego that very evening and leave them in the patio. Next day at noon the farmer could call and get his thirty mules. Soon the slaves duly filed into the courtyard, the magician taking care to collect his fee in advance.

No sooner had the Spaniard disappeared from sight on his way homeward than Diego instructed the slaves to run away as fast and far as they could and never to reappear in that neighborhood for if they came back, he warned, they might be forced once more into their cruel master's service.

Diego then went to the stable of a friend and collected a quantity of mule manure. Back home, he scattered this about the patio where the Spaniard had last seen his slaves. Very early next morning, Diego sent his servants to the nearby river to catch turtles. When the farmer arrived at noon he found the courtyard littered with mule droppings and in the middle of the space was a bulging bag that wriggled and writhed. The farmer opened it and out scrambled thirty turtles. Diego expressed the utmost surprise and indignation. He accused another famous magician who had visited him the previous evening of having changed the mules to turtles as a prank. After much fuss, the farmer was finally convinced that the turtles were his slaves, and staggered home bearing the squirming bag on his back.

After discussions and jokes inspired by my father's story had subsided, we all went into the living room, the most charming place in all the house. The bright-colored paintings on the panels of its doors, the gayly patterned draperies framing the windows, and its finely built, comfortable furniture made the great parlor cheerful and invited one to relax. Many flowers in tall vases added to its joyful atmosphere and filled the air with fragrance.

As I so often had done before, I impulsively went over to the glass cabinet where my mother kept the heirlooms she held dearest—for the cult of the family is strong among us Guatemalans. There, as always, were the lovely miniatures by Francesco Cabrera, the finest Guatemalan artist of this genre of the early nineteenth century. In the course of his long career, Cabrera painted over a thousand similar tiny gems, capturing the vitality and individuality of his contemporaries as only a great artist and painter on ivory can do.

Luminous, clear-eyed, breathing, were the faces of the grandparents of my mother, Don Juan Matheu and Doña Zoe de Sinibaldi de Matheu, and my father's parents, Don Juan Francisco Aguirre and Doña Luz Alvarez de las Asturias y Wading de Aguirre. Guatemala, like the United States, has been a melting pot of the New World, as the story of these miniatured forebears suggests. Alvarez de las Asturias and Aguirre are Spanish names, Matheu is derived from Matthew, an English ancestor, as Wading is from an Irish great-grandmother. Sinibaldi was the name of an Italian marquis high in Vatican circles.

Among the family relics in the cabinet that always fascinated me was a set of jewelry made in Paris with tresses cut from my paternal grandmother at her death. The set, of gold and black enamel, is comprised of necklace, brooch, ring, earrings and bracelet. In the center of each piece, in place of a diamond or other stone, is a tiny decoration of pansies and garlands made of grandmother's hair, protected by a diminutive pane of very thin glass. I had always been intrigued by the mysterious way in which the bracelet, made of ten tightly woven strands of her hair braided together, is reported to have lengthened continuously during the seven years following my grandmother's death.

The atmosphere in the living room that night was too gay for a lugubrious subject to find a properly unsmiling audience. But when I produced the famous old bracelet and started measuring it as I had done so often before, to see if the hair was still growing, some of us recalled other instances in Guatemala where human hair was said to have continued growing after the death of its owner. Someone said that, a century ago, when the graveyards were moved from the heart of Guatemala City to the capital's outskirts as a sanitary precaution, many nuns whose heads had been kept shaved until their death were found wearing long hair. And my mother, who had a prodigious memory for tales relating to the religious life of the old capital of Santiago, told us a weird story of filial piety that dates back to the eighteenth century.

After the capital had been removed following the great earthquake of 1773, she said, a highly talented young Indian continued to live in the former official center which was now getting to be known as Antigua. He was the last of a Quiché family that had preserved since the days of Maya glory that people's remarkable knowledge of the art of embalming. As usual among Indian wise men, the knowledge of this trade was passed on from father to son as topmost exclusive secrets.

The young Indian embalmer was intensely interested in chemistry and because of his exceptional aptitude had hopes of going far in that science. But his father died and he did not have the means to continue his studies. Too, he could not leave Antigua, for his aged mother, grief-stricken at the death of her husband, made the young man vow never to leave her as long as he lived. Soon after making this vow, the youth's betrothed died and this additional blow led him to forsake the world and prepare for the priesthood.

Once ordained, he was placed in charge of the church of La Merced and took his mother to live with him in its rectory. For a number of years they lived happily together, doing many good deeds in aid of the poor. The priest was even able to further his scientific research and had a small laboratory in the rectory where he spent his leisure moments.

His mother died when she was nearly a hundred years old. Holding her in his arms as she expired, the priest recalled his vow that he would never leave her during his own lifetime. In utmost secrecy, he embalmed her body with all the art he had gathered from his Quiché-Maya forebears. Then he dressed her in her usual garments, arranged her hair and placed her seated in her favorite chair where she looked indeed as if asleep. For the seven years that he survived her, only he and one devoted old servant knew that she was not still in the world of the living. Both were aware that if the authorities learned of the mother's death, they would insist on burying her away from her son. Through those seven strange years, the woman's hair was carefully brushed each day and her nails frequently trimmed. When the priest died, she was discovered, her body as flexible as if she were merely asleep, and her hair seemed still growing. The mother and son were buried together.

Even before the strange old tale was ended, we had begun hearing a sound as of countless metal drums coming from the direction of the *rancheria,* the lane near the mansion along which were the cottages of most of Retana's Indian laborers. No sooner had my mother ended her story than we slipped over to the windows to find out what all the noise was about. Only my mother remained calm in her chair.

"I know what is going on," she said. "Today's paper announced an eclipse of the moon tonight. If you wish to see how fervently the Indians cling to ancient beliefs, go to the *rancheria* and watch them but do not interrupt their rites for they would resent it deeply."

The moon was half covered by shadow as my brothers and I walked toward the Indians gathered in the *rancheria.* There, each family stood before its cottage, making a deafening noise by beating pots, pans and even sprinklers together, and striking with sticks whatever metal objects they could lay their hands on. They all shouted as loud as they could—some were insulting, others praying, others menacing with their fists in the direction of the moon. My brother Arturo went up to one of the men and asked why they were doing this.

"We are helping the moon, señor," he answered. "Her husband the sun is drunk and is beating her. You can see that this is so by the way the face of the moon is gradually growing dark. Thanks to our noise we will frighten him so that he will not continue hurting her. Then her face will become bright again. Just watch and with your own eyes you will see that all this is true."

Although it was a funny scene, the Indians' spirit of deep feeling in the beating of kettles and shouting inspired too much respect for us to laugh. The moon indeed soon lost its shadow and shone forth once again, more dazzling than ever—no doubt, we told them, thanks to their aid and that of countless other groups of Indian kettle-thumpers through the land. Yet I thought to myself from a woman's point of view that all this chivalry toward the moon was rather strange to find among natives who themselves so often get drunk in taverns on pay days and come home to beat their wives.

After the eclipse was over the Indians quietly went into their homes to sleep. We returned to the mansion and retired to our rooms. Before going to bed I remained a long time at my window meditating upon the insouciant, pitiable ignorance of the Indians while breathing in the fragrance that rose on the breeze from the exotic exuberant garden round the house and enjoying the peace and silence of Retana's night which only the distant chirping of crickets interrupted.

9

MIRACLES AND PILGRIMAGES

Esquipulas

Religious pilgrimages are dear to the hearts of the Guatemalan Indians. Countless thousands of them attach a very personal importance to some one sacred image, such as that of the *Virgen de Candelaria,* the Black Christ of Esquipulas, or the Child Jesus of Atocha, and they travel on foot long distances each year to their shrines—often taking along goods to sell at the fair which accompanies the pilgrim festivals. The Indians are convinced that their prayers will be more readily heard if they come thus in person to tell their favorite symbol of God about their illness, their financial and family troubles.

Of course Spain and Catholic Europe generally have always had their pilgrimages or *romerías,* as we call them. And I am told that in ancient Mayan times, long before the arrival of Christians, the Guatemalan Indians had comparable pagan shrines to which they came from far away to worship. So conversion to the European custom of pilgrimages was not difficult.

The most famous and popular of all our pilgrimages is that to the Christ of Esquipulas, a small town located near the juncture of the frontiers of Guatemala, Honduras and

Salvador. Although the chief festival day is January 15, this great center of worship attracts four or five thousand pilgrims a month throughout the year, not only Indians but persons of all races and classes. Many come by plane or auto, many are from other countries in South America. The Indians pride themselves on coming afoot, often making the final stage of the trips on their knees. You can recognize the full-fledged pilgrim on this and other *romerías* by his wide straw hat charmingly adorned with moss, tiny gourds, and many-colored flowers.

In the majestic church at Esquipulas the sight of such fervent and heterogeneous throngs praying before the renowned, miraculous Black Christ is one of the most moving and faith-inspiring in the world. The image of Christ Crucified, originally brown, has become black through the centuries from incense and smoke of millions of candles. The image is draped from the waist in white satin, and is decorated with valuable jewels. Once a year, Indian devotees who come specially for this rite from Nahuala and Chichicastenango, ceremoniously change the garment. On the main altar, at the feet of Christ, are images of Mary Magdalene, Saint John, and the *Virgen de Dolores*.

The history of Esquipulas is almost as fabulous as the miracles its Christ has accomplished, and is in tune with the many curious legends that have developed through the ages around this shrine and its pilgrimage. As early reports and ruins indicate, the site was an important center for worship and trade long before the coming of the white man. It is only a day on foot from here to Copan, one of the major cities during the Golden Age of the Maya, and the place is believed to have been closely linked to that great pagan capital.

When the *conquistadores* approached, Izquipulas, the local chieftain, considered resistance futile, welcomed the invaders and embraced Christianity. To repay his compliance and stimulate other small tribes to emulate his example, the Spaniards treated his people with a certain regard and gave the town they established here the native ruler's name.

Izquipulas and the richer men of the tribe wanted a Christian image to worship. They convinced the Catholic missionaries that their people could not be brought to feel confidence in a white deity but would welcome a deity of their own brown color. This assignment the priests carried to Quirio Cataño, the finest sculptor of the day in Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala, who duly carved for them a Christ from the dark brown balsam wood which closely resembles the color of the Indian skin. Cataño always confessed and received communion when beginning one of his religious sculptures. But so impressed was he by the devotion of these Indians, and so convinced that further conversions depended in part on the emotional appeal he would convey by his chisel, that he went every morning to mass in the course of this holy task, and also prayed for inspiration more frequently than was his wont.

Today, as through the intervening centuries, the Christ of Esquipulas is worshipped by countless pilgrims in a fully Christian spirit. But other thousands of Indians meanwhile see in it a divinity closer to their ancient pagan gods than to the God of the white men. That so many Indians from Nahuala, Chichicastenango and other strongly pagan communities come here suggests this. The very atmosphere of Esquipulas, with the great stone Mayan carvings close to the Catholic temple, comprises a pagan as well as a Christian spirit, and the advent of numerous *ladino* and white worshippers do not prevent the pilgrimage from being predominantly an Indian festival.

As a matter of fact, I have heard that some more thoroughly pagan groups show such devotion to this shrine because their wise sorcerers have told them that buried below the Black Christ are statues of some of the major Mayan gods. The blackness of the Christ is said to be associated by the Indians not only with their own dark color and their own race but—when they have not been in close constant contact with Christianity—with the Black Lord of the Maya who controlled violent death, and another of their great pagan gods, the Tall Black One, protector of travelers.

The Christ of Esquipulas, installed in 1595, soon became famous among Indian Christians and was widely believed to perform miracles. Devotion to it spread to the white settlers and to foreign lands at an early date, and especially after a truly convincing episode that occurred in the first half of the eighteenth century. Fray Pedro Pardo de Figueroa had come from Peru and was serving as Bishop of Guatemala when he fell gravely ill. He wasted away and was told by his physicians that he had only a few hours to live.

Preparations for his funeral were proceeding busily when one of his friends, just back that day from Esquipulas, told the bishop about the miraculous cures he himself had witnessed there, and pinned on the dying man some relics and a small picture of the Black Christ which he had brought back with him. The pilgrim and the bishop prayed together and before his visitor left, Fray Pedro began to show signs of relief. To the astonishment of his medical advisers, he was back to normal health the following day.

That occurred in 1737. Shortly afterwards, the bishop visited Esquipulas in its verdant valley dramatically framed by high mountains. On finding that its miraculous and beautiful image of Christ was housed in a most humble shrine, he ordered an imposing temple built for it, which was completed in 1758. Years later, when he felt himself failing, Fray Pedro, who by now had been named archbishop, returned to the holy village of Esquipulas to die. At his request he was buried under the main altar of the noble church he had had built here.

Above the bones of the founder, the marble main altar is decorated with an exuberance of votive offerings and artistic gifts, which extend over to one side of the church. Silver and crystal chandeliers light the walls of the temple where hang large canvases by the country's finest artists and smaller primitively painted pictures presented by devotees in gratitude for the Black Christ's intercession in some emergency. The latter always refer to the miracle accomplished by the Christ.

Curious customs and beliefs have grown up about this pilgrimage. On high points along the road as one approaches the sanctuary are piles of stones deposited by countless pilgrims of the past. It is usual for the pious native visitor to pause by one of these to say a prayer and to add a stone to the heap as he comes, and as he starts on his way home. There are also two famous boulders, one above the other, near the road. They are surrounded by a litter of pebbles and smaller stones. As you pass by, you are likely to see native pilgrims in their broad gay hats pelting the boulders in what must at first seem a most extraordinarily misapplied and pointless enthusiasm. Actually, throwing stones at these boulders is a highly pious act. The Church has always made a strong point in Guatemala of prohibiting a child's parents and godparents (who are *compadres* to one another) from having any but the most platonic relations. The priests wish to discourage the idea that the spiritual bonds linking them because of the child could serve as excuse for forming intimacies. Now, as the legend of long ago is told, a couple related to one another by these holy bonds made love at this spot, whereupon they were turned to stone. Pilgrims throw rocks at the stone lovers to prove their indignation at their sin.

Aside from His curing of Fray Pedro, perhaps the best known miracle of the Black Christ refers to one of the wealthiest men of Santiago in the seventeenth century, Don Juan Palomeque. As the story is retold by our distinguished novelist and poet, Don José Milla, the rich and cynical man gradually grew blind and his doctors finally told him they had no hope of any cure. Although not devout, he came in his despair in pilgrimage to the Señor de Esquipulas. His sight was immediately restored when he beseechingly knelt before the sacred image of the Black Christ. In gratitude, Don Juan left on the altar a heavy gold chain which he had brought as an offering in case his prayers were answered.

On his way home he and his servant rode their horses side by side. He joked with the old servitor about the stupidity of the doctors who had assured him there was no remedy for his blindness.

"The physicians are not to blame, sir," the servant answered. "Only God, for whom nothing is impossible, was able to make you see once more."

"Oh! God did that so as to get my gold chain!" scoffed Don Juan.

No sooner had he said these words than he sensed a weighty object in his pocket. He reached in and his hand was convinced that it was his gold chain. He raised it incredulously so as to see with his eyes whether his fingers were not mistaken. But only his fingers and the servant could affirm it was indeed his chain, for he had once more become blind.

Then there is the legend, hard to believe, of the old sinner who, becoming chronically ill as a consequence of his excesses, vowed year after year to go in pilgrimage to Esquipulas, promising each time that when he did he would give handsome presents to the Black Christ. He kept on postponing the arduous journey, however, because of his worldly and selfish activities. Finally he died without having fulfilled his vow.

Years later, when his remains were removed from his tomb, his skull succeeded in escaping and hopped along the road until it reached the outskirts of the town of Esquipulas. Some pilgrims who were approaching the shrine on their knees saw the skull and carried it the rest of the way to the feet of the Black Christ. But the skull vanished, and when the pilgrims who had tried to speed its journey were on their way home they saw that it had returned to the spot where they had picked it up, from whence it hopped and bounded along to its goal unaided.

Far away from Esquipulas, in the opposite, northwestern corner of Guatemala, is another very holy place to which crowds of pilgrims travel each year to share in the ceremonies that take place on February 2. Here near the city of Huehuetenango is the village and shrine of Chiantla. One of the richest mine owners of the early days of the Conquest gave its church a statue of the *Virgen de Candelaria* in solid silver. As if in response to this gesture of devotion, the man's mines increased remarkably in output. The inhabitants of the region became doubly convinced of the superhuman powers of the image when its donor miraculously escaped death as the mine tunnel he was inspecting caved in. Following the example of the man who gave the beautiful silver statue, many wealthy persons since then have made rich gifts to the church of Chiantla so that today it has a profusion of lovely gold and silver candlesticks, vases and lamps. One devotee gave a massive ingot of silver which has been expended through the years for oil to burn on a lamp before the silver Virgin.

Almost entirely favored by Indian pilgrims because it is out of the way and inaccessible except by foot or on mule back, is the village of Chajul in which is a miraculous image of the Christ of Golgotha, also known as the *Señor de Chajul.* Each year on the second Friday of Lent thousands pray at His shrine.

The revered sculpture of Chajul is said to have been found mysteriously long ago by two Spanish soldiers at the same spot where the temple now stands. Soon after they died, a devout woman of the neighborhood had a dream. In it, the Christ of Chajul appeared to her. He told her that He wished the soldiers, who had found Him and had taken care of Him while they lived, to be always His guardians. The woman promptly ordered statues carved in faithful resemblance of the two soldiers and installed them as sentinels in the church, one on each side of the Christ.

The Indians of Chajul, however, were indignant at the thought that white men should guard forever their Christ who they felt was one of their own people, and who by then had gained wide renown for His healing powers. So a band of them got together one night and threw the two statues into a far-off and deep ravine. The men then returned to their church to pray but on approaching the altar they stopped, trembling and awe-struck. For the effigies of the soldiers were back where they had formerly been, although scratched and damaged from their fall into the abyss. No one since then has dared molest the two Spanish soldiers and the Indians of Chajul now recognize the old woman's dream as truly interpreting their Lord's wishes.

The image of Christ is on the main altar of the Chajul church, with the statues of the two soldiers flanking it. Nearby are wooden racks with multitudes of crude nails protruding, and on these nails sick pilgrims hang votive figures in wax representing the part of the body ailing them. There are thousands of small heads, eyes, noses, teeth, hearts, arms, hands, legs and feet. According to the native faith, the Christ will understand one's troubles better if such visible facsimiles are within His view.

Indians who pay special homage to the *Señor de Chajul* are second in number only to those who go in pilgrimage to Esquipulas. Incidentally, even when it is practicable for a poor Indian to make more than one pilgrimage in any one year, many will not go to more than one shrine because of their belief that the image they worship as most efficacious in aiding them would be offended if any other were to be paid an equal homage.

A great festival on May 2 and 3 each year attracts thousands of devotees of the image of *El Niño de Atocha* to Lake Amatitlan, one of the most charming sites in all Guatemala. In recent years it has become fashionable for families of Guatemala City, only fourteen miles away, to spend their week-ends and vacations at this delightful lake, where modern homes and bungalows overlook the water, and where there is much happy activity, bathing, boating, and fishing. Along the shores are famous medicinal hot springs so that the lake has also become a modern health resort. Meanwhile the village of Amatitlan itself continues a center of quaint native life, with a colorful market. Here, venders of Indian handicrafts, fruits and flowers come from far and wide. The candies of Amatitlan, sold in small brightly painted oblong wooden boxes, are popular among children —especially because they are in the shapes of various miniature animals in many gay colors. And then there is the image of *El Niño de Atocha,* in the village church, whose story goes way back to the earliest days of Spanish rule.

When the Dominican missionaries first came to Lake Amatitlan in the middle of the sixteenth century, they found it had been for ages an important center for pagan fertility rites. Particularly during the summer, the Indians carried out elaborate ceremonies in honor of the greatest of their gods. Images of lesser deities were brought here from other areas at this time to share in homage paid the chief god. Children were sacrificed by drowning them in the lake during these ceremonies intended primarily to assure the people good harvests.

The Dominican monks went about developing customs and rituals which would appeal to the native love of drama and fun, and would turn pagan minds and hearts toward Christian practices. The missionaries created the town of Amatitlan by obliging the scattered Indian settlements to come together at this point in the shadow of a hastily built church. A monastery was founded in 1549 nearby. The monks saw to it that better fish than Lake Amatitlan had previously had were brought to it in huge earthen Indian jars from rich waters, and promoted the fishing industry on the lake. The Dominicans tried their best to establish this charming lake and its surroundings as their private preserve. When this was denied them, they carried on nevertheless, exerting a predominant influence over the lake people. The historian Remesal tells in one of his books about this controversy in which Don Francisco de la Cueva, almost ninety years old, was one of the judges.

To counter the alluring and exciting ancient summer ceremonies of fertility, the Christian strategists decided to feature each year the Catholic festival of the Cross on May 3, a date coinciding with the arrival of the Indians for their rites in the woods across the lake from the thoroughly Christianized town of Amatitlan. An added inducement to the attention of the pagans was the fact that the cross was closely associated by the Indians with the mystic Mayan Xucut. As the Indians before the Conquest had combined their fertility ceremonies with a great market by the lake and had taken time out for water sports and for bathing in the healing medicinal springs close by its shores, these wholesome but not solemn doings were encouraged by the missionaries. Even today the pilgrimage on May 2 and 3, in which homage is paid to the Child Jesus, *El Niño de Atocha,* is one of the gayest of all our religious events, made particularly picturesque by the participation of the *sambos,* descendants of local Indians intermarried with Negroes who were brought here to cultivate nearby cochineal plantations.

Still another great festival was established by the priests at Amatitlan, the *feria de la Asuncion,* which starts on August 15 each year. Beginning in 1620, this was for many years a great occasion for sports and play. In the old days when the capital was at Antigua, it was customary for the caballeros and señoritas of high society to come here for the Ascension festival, women and men riding lively horses and racing one another along the road from the capital. Their horses were garlanded for this occasion with long rosaries made of pieces of candy wrapped in corn husks dyed by the Indians in brilliant vegetable colors. This *fiesta* was later transferred to Jocotenango, a village in the outskirts of Santiago and afterwards to the new capital, Guatemala City.

The *Niño de Atocha,* a seated image of Jesus as a child, holding the globe of the world in His hand, was installed in the Amatitlan church in the sixteenth century. Soon the natives began ascribing miracles, or *ejemplos* as they say, to the sculpture. Once, so one of the many legends about this image goes, three men who had no faith in God and had led evil lives went fishing together in Lake Amatitlan. A violent storm suddenly tossed their frail boat about. The canoe quickly filled with water and the men realized that they were in grave danger of drowning.

In anguish, one of them exclaimed, "I would believe in God if only the *Niño de Atocha* could save us!"

"Don't be foolish!" another of the men retorted. "Just because fanatics think the statue of the Child Jesus is all-powerful, since it holds the world in its hand, that is no reason why we should go crazy too!"

"Still, He could save us," groaned the third man, "if He is really the Son of God."

No sooner had these words been spoken than the three men saw a vision: *El Niño de Atocha* was standing near them above the fierce waves. *El Niño* made a gesture of command with the hand that was not holding the world, whereupon the waters of the lake instantly became as calm as on the most peaceful day.

Reaching shore, the men hurried to throw themselves at the feet of the miraculous statue where they vowed they would lead better lives in the future.

Another tale which the local natives love to recount in reference to their most understanding protector, their beloved *Niño de Atocha,* concerns a married woman who fell in love with her husband's brother.

While the husband was at work, the woman and her lover used to slip away from their village and hold their rendezvous in a secluded spot beside the Michatoya River which empties from the lake by way of a beautiful waterfall toward the Pacific Ocean.

A jealous neighbor spied upon them and brought back news of their meetings to the husband. That evening he concealed from his family the bitter anger he felt but next day set out with his gun for the place in which he had been told his wife and his brother met. Slipping stealthily through the woods, and while at a distance, he beheld the couple in a passionate embrace. As he started raising his gun, his wife saw him. There was no time for flight. In her despair, she implored *El Niño de Atocha* to aid her. Answering her prayer, the Child Jesus appeared between the lovers and the husband.

The woman noticed that *El Niño* had a squirming rabbit in His hand which He set free. The small, short-tailed animal hopped straight toward the husband who was aiming his gun and was about to shoot. The husband saw the rabbit and his hunter's instinct got the better of his desire for vengeance. He shot at the little animal and killed it.

During the few moments it took him to pick up the rabbit, the woman's lover slid into the river and swam out of sight. When the hunter reached his wife, the game triumphantly slung over his shoulder, he found her innocently picking flowers.

"Where is he?" he shouted, recovering his former anger.

"Who? I am alone," she replied sweetly.

The husband looked all about but saw no sign of any other person. "Caramba!" he exclaimed, "I could have sworn I saw him with you. How gossips can make you see things that don't exist!"

So the married pair went home happily together, well laden with game and flowers, the wife vowing to herself that never again would she place herself in a position where she would have to test the miraculous powers of *El Niño de Atocha.*

Not far from Amatitlan on the way to Guatemala City is another pilgrimage center, the small village of Villanueva, which is noted not only for its sacred image but for a major battle fought here and for a gruesome story of how its priest of long ago was entombed.

In the early days of our independence from Spain, a battle at Villanueva was crucial in determining our internal political destiny, a battle remembered also because the ignorant soldiers of the defeated rebel general attributed their rout to a heavy fog which they were convinced had been brought by their enemy to the battlefield in huge bags.

Father Serra, a Spanish priest serving the Villanueva church many years ago, on disinterring some of his relatives saw that the position of their bodies indicated they had been buried alive while in a state of catalepsy. Fearing a similar fate, he asked that on his own death he should be buried in a glass coffin, to be placed at the entrance of the chapel in the cemetery so that he could be rescued should he revive. Besides, he explained, people would devote more attention to their souls if they could realize by watching his disintegration, how horrible their own bodies would become after death.

Father Serra's wishes were piously obeyed. For some months after having enclosed his body in a glass coffin, his friends kept constant vigil to make sure he did not revive and call for help. At last time mercifully clouded the glass and finally the body of Father Serra was buried, to the relief of both his sinning and his innocent parishioners.

But the thousands who visit Villanueva in a religious mood do so to pray before a splendid sculpture in its church, a Christ Crucified known as El Señor de Trujillo. The miracle-making carving came to Guatemala from Spain in the sixteenth century among the effects of a prominent early settler, the founder of the noble and wealthy family of Arrivillaga. When the adventurous pioneer reached the soil of Central America after his long voyage, he left his ship to hurry inland to friends who were eagerly awaiting him. His baggage was to have followed him carried by his servants, but while the ship was being unloaded, pirates were seen approaching. The ship's men and his servitors fled, abandoning the gentleman's possessions. The pirates looted at their leisure whatever they desired, piling up everything they could not take and setting fire to it.

When the owner heard of the pirate attack he hastened back with soldiers to the port, to find only debris and ashes, except for a single large box which remained undamaged in the middle of the ashes of the fire. Within this box was the great Crucifix known today as the *Señor de Trujillo,* whose escape from destruction only the presence of unearthly powers could explain.

Since that day the image has been considered miraculous and numerous devout persons visit it daily hoping for aid in their sorrows and difficulties. From the most distinguished families to the humblest in Central America come gifts of flowers and candles and incense for His altar, in token of their devotion.

On the first Friday of Lent you can see great numbers of pilgrims hurrying along the roads leading into the otherwise quiet little town of San Felipe on the outskirts of Antigua and crowding into the charming church beside its plaza to pay their reverence to the life-size recumbent sculpture of the Entombed Christ, *Jesus Sepultado.* Indians in deepest introspection stand here, holding before them votive candles to accompany their praying, and many, too, are the white people and the *ladino* townsfolk, some of whom have trudged the long miles from Guatemala City and different villages because of the belief that a pilgrimage afoot holds more merit in the sight of Heaven.

Whether by reason of the miracles attributed to it, or due to the exceptionally touching aspect of the finely carved figure, or else because the image has escaped so many hazards, this sculpture of *Jesus Sepultado* is one of the most revered of all Guatemala's many marvelous religious images. Originally it belonged in an Indian village which was abandoned after the inhabitants were decimated by smallpox in 1670. The villagers came and settled in what is now San Felipe, but the chapel they promptly built for their already widely worshipped Christ burned to the ground. Still another was built for the sculpture, only to be destroyed by an earthquake. Through all this the statue remained unscathed. The present church harboring it is a recent structure but full of the atmosphere of olden times and ancient in its architectural style.

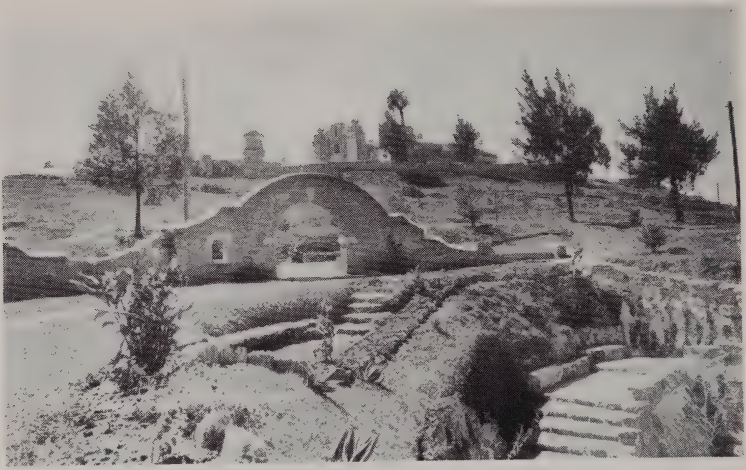
The spirit that lingers in Guatemala's religious sanctuaries even in recent times continues to breed miracles and legends, although our humblest Indians of today are acquainted with such modern devices as radios and airplanes. Not long ago I read in a local Guatemalan newspaper of an incident that had just occurred at San Felipe, an *ejemplo,* as the Indians would call it, which might well have come from the annals of the earliest times of the Conquest, had not its protagonists worn modern clothing.

An American tourist visiting the San Felipe church was so moved by the startling fusion of the realistic and the mystic in the noble carving of the *Jesus Sepultado* that he left a ten dollar bill in the donation plate near the famous statue—an exceptionally generous gift for this humble parish.

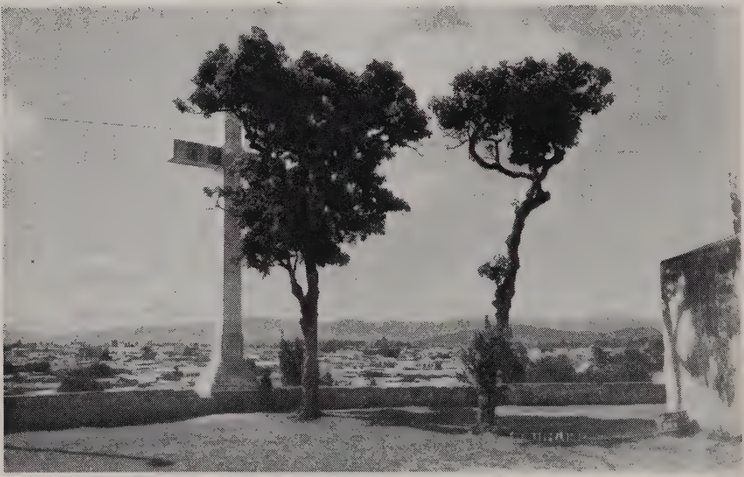
The foreign traveler was escorted by an Indian boy who knew his native village well and had picked up a few words of English. This youth had been honest up to this point in his life but the sight of the unusual and casually placed bill was overwhelmingly tempting and he resolved to steal it. So he redoubled his garrulous though stumbling description of the ornaments of the church interior, pointing things out feverishly, meanwhile edging his way toward the donation plate near the statue of Christ Entombed. With his back to the plate he kept up his monologue, distracting the visitor's attention. His hand was groping back of him. Just as he at last seized the ten dollar bill, a blow as of an iron fist struck his hand. He dropped the money

Guatemala City's Cathedral.

Statue of General Justo Rufino Barrios.



The small church, el Cerrito del Carmen, built by Juan Croz in 1620.



The view from the hill at el Cerrito del Carmen, Guatemala City.

and cried out in pain and fear. While the puzzled tourist looked all around and verified that no one was near who could have hit the boy, the latter confessed his attempt at theft, weeping bitterly. His hand was so badly bruised that he had to be taken to the hospital to have it bandaged.

Many pilgrims who pay homage to the *Jesus Sepultado* of San Felipe during the first days of Lent stay on in the nearby city of Antigua to take part in the dramatic events of Holy Week, a season in which the glorious former capital relives the pageantry of those deeply devout centuries when, as Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala, it was the Christian heart of all Central America. Strange, semi-pagan rites linger during Holy Week in Indian villages, but here in Antigua you find the austere yet elaborate Catholic ceremonials of the age of Spain's vast world-wide empire, practiced with scarcely any alteration.

My brother Jorge, who has often taken part in the traditional Procession of Silence or of the Via Crucis, has told me about this most solemn event of Antigua's Holy Week. Only men participate, all of them observing an utter silence throughout the long ceremony so that the prayers pronounced by the officiating priest at each of the fourteen Stations of the Cross may be heard by everyone.

Starting at three in the morning, the departure of the Procession of Silence is announced by the slow sad pealing of a bell in the church of San Francisco where are assembled the thousands of men from the city and outlying villages who attend the function. A deep emotion of solemn respect and devotion fills the throng as the resonant notes echo through the still night from the mountains that frame in the valley in which lies Antigua.

Fourteen times rings the bell. Then the prayer appropriate to the first of the stations of the cross is said by the priest directing the procession. After which the men who have been given the honor of serving as bearers raise to their shoulders the famous sculpture of *Jesus Nazareno de los Pasos,* the Nazarene of the Stations of the Cross, a superb life-size image carved by Juan de Aguirre in 1565. This Christ is borne along, pausing at each station by the sides of the tree-lined avenue which extends from the church of San Francisco to culminate in the church of El Calvario where are the thirteenth and fourteenth stations. The men not serving as bearers walk slowly, flanking the officiating priest and the sacred image, each man holding a candle so that by their number a curious brilliance scarcely of this earth makes the avenue and its tall *amatle* trees as bright as day might be on some other, more celestial planet.

Antigua no longer has the charming old Palm Sunday custom, still observed in a few Guatemalan villages, of dressing a child to impersonate Jesus and riding him through the streets on a donkey, followed by twelve boys dressed as the Apostles and by a multitude bearing palm leaves—palms afterwards preserved to protect the home against lightning or burned to provide the ashes for Ash Wednesday.

But Antigua still follows the ancient traditional visit of homage to the Nazarene on Holy Monday. The sculpture of the Nazarene in the Merced church is the most favored on this occasion. During the ceremony, to which come the social élite of Guatemala City and Antigua, one of the country's best orchestras plays, and there is always exceptionally fine singing.

On Maundy Thursday is the ceremony of the washing of feet, when twelve children representing the Apostles come to each of the several Antigua churches, where a priest washes their feet in a gesture intended to dramatize the humility of Christ. That evening large crowds of worshippers visit the *sagrarios* or shrines placed before the main altar in each church, where are exhibited the season's most attractively arranged *huertos*. The *huertos* are richly varied offerings of flowers, plants, sprouted grain, heaped dishes of fresh vegetables and all kinds of fruit. Such offerings follow a custom derived from the Mosaic law mentioned in the Old Testament. Our natives pile up the fruits and vegetables in small pyramids and trim them with fancy forms cut from gold and silver paper. The gilt paper sparkles in the quivering light of the tall wax candles burning in the shrine. The *huertos* cover the floor in front of the main altar overflowing into the center aisle, sometimes extending down it as far as sixty feet—so numerous are the gifts sent by the devout.

From Thursday morning on, the many bells of the city, whose ringing is usually such a familiar characteristic of this so pious city, are silenced. All one hears are the soft subdued sounds of wooden *matracas,* those instruments invented by the earliest Christians of Rome to call the faithful secretly to prayer in the catacombs without arousing the suspicions of the pagan soldiery.

Good Friday is the occasion in Antigua for two elaborate processions which pass, as do others of Holy Week, over streets picturesquely strewn by Indian devotees with brightly colored sawdust artistically arranged in patterns. The first of these processions, simulating the journey of Christ to Calvary, sets out at noon, winding through many of the city streets. It pays particular homage to a sculpture of the Nazarene over which a purple robe has been draped.

This image, whose *anda* or platform is adorned with flowers and olive branches, is borne on the shoulders of *cucuruchos,* men dressed in long purple tunics and purple masks, who represent those who crucified Our Lord. Following The Nazarene come other statues carried on the shoulders of devout persons: Our Lady of Sorrows, Saint John, Mary Magdalene and the Holy Women who always accompanied the Mother of Jesus.

That same afternoon, from the church of La Escuela de Cristo, an even more imposing and solemn procession moves slowly through the city, ending only long after dark. Called the Procession of the Holy Burial, it culminates with a sculpture of Christ Entombed wrapped for the occasion in a white silk sheet, His head resting on a white satin pillow. The image is encased in a glass, bronze-edged coffin, a gift from my father years ago, which my brother Carlos, while he was the leader of the Brotherhood of the Holy Burial, proudly trimmed with orchids. The *cucuruchos,* the majority of whom are white men and ladinos, on this event are robed and masked in black instead of purple. The heavy effigy is passed along to other bearers after every block because of its great weight and so that a larger number of men may share in this pious privilege. In recent years the image of Christ is lighted up after nightfall by electric bulbs concealed in the glass coffin—and although the idea sounds frightfully modernistic, I have found the effect most beautiful and touching.

The Procession of the Holy Burial is the longest and most elaborate of all those of Antigua's Holy Week. First come statues of angels holding in their hands the insignia of the Passion. They are followed along by a number of large platforms on which are groups of life-size figures representing scenes related to Christ's final days on earth: Pontius Pilate washing his hands, the Cyrenean helping Christ with the cross, Veronica wiping Christ's face with her veil, and others. Then comes the Christ Entombed, behind which is a band playing funeral marches, and groups of priests praying. A short distance after the main cortege come women bearing the statues of the Virgin of Sorrows and of her faithful saints, enveloped on this occasion in black robes.

Another procession carrying the famous *Señor Sepultado* of San Felipe comes out the same day from that village, but here all the bearers are Indians.

Not in Antigua or other larger towns, but in some small Indian villages, a strange ceremony is featured on Easter-Even. An effigy dressed in old clothes, whom the people call Judas, and which has been hanging since Maundy Thursday, preferably from a building under construction, is taken down on this day and bound to the tail of a mule, chosen from among those that bring produce to the market place. Firecrackers attached at the same time to the mule's tail start to explode, whereupon the poor animal gallops madly through the streets, dragging the Judas dummy. The mule is finally caught by some boys who have run after it, and "Judas" is untied and burned or torn to pieces by the populace.

Some remoter Indian villages in various regions follow the same tradition of the Chichicastenango area and give a crude version of a Passion Play during the Holy Week. There is always an ardently pious man who volunteers to take the part of Christ and endures the whipping patiently while he carries his heavy wooden cross. To the Guatemalan Indian, whether living his daily routine, observing the ceremonies of Holy Week, or going on pilgrimage to a miraculous Christian image, religion and work are inseparable, as are the facts of being alive, of suffering and dying. Theirs is a faith and fundamental philosophy seldom found among more enlightened and worldly peoples.

10

TALES IN A CRATER

Volcan de Agua

THE LEGENDARY AND LOVELY peak of Agua Volcano, higher than Mount Hood and Fujiyama, haunted the dreams and stories of my childhood. However, I had never climbed to its summit. Years passed, and then a charming American friend, Dorothy, came to visit us one Christmas season in our Guatemala City home. At last I had a good pretext for urging the ascension of the volcano and patiently set about preparing for it, with Dorothy's eager cooperation.

We knew that my family was too busy until after the New Year and the Feast of the Three Kings to consider the project, so we plunged into the season's lively festivities, helping arrange the *nacimiento* in our home and taking part in the touching old ceremonies of the *posadas* which have come down to us from early Spanish times.

Nacimientos, or *crèches,* illustrating the Holy Family in Bethlehem, are prepared most elaborately in Guatemela, although in all Catholic countries the *crèches* is a fascinating custom, a truly artistic expression of folk art. Even the humblest home in Guatemala prepares a *nacimiento* at this season. But with a large room for it, of course, it can be made most extensive and elaborate.

My family's Guatemala City home was typical of a number of old residences in the capital, with lovely arcades surrounding colorful patios full of flowering plants, and a pretty fountain stocked with tiny rare fish in the center of the main courtyard. Antique furniture of ebony inlaid with mother of pearl, enameled clocks, large mirrors with wide golden frames embellished the rooms, where among other treasures was a hammered silver punch bowl given by King Charles the Second of Spain, to an early Captain-General, Don Sebastian Alvarez Alfonso Rosica de Caldas, an uncle of my ancestor, Don Sancho, who brought him to Guatemala in 1665. As in all those spacious old houses we had in ours a room reserved for the traditional *nacimiento* of Christmas time.

While we watched and sometimes assisted, a carpenter prepared the *nacimiento,* which must be ready by December sixteenth. First a pale blue material was nailed over the ceiling of the room, with a white filmy textile here and there over the blue to imitate clouds. On almost invisible threads, angels and stars of silver paper were hung from this "sky." A long painting representing the Bethlehem countryside was then attached so as to cover the walls of the room. The carpenter built a scaffold below the landscape sloping gradually outward to about a foot from the floor. Over it heavy brown paper was formed into a series of hills and valleys. On this base many little clay figures were grouped about. Not only were all the traditional Biblical characters relating to the birth of Jesus found here, but also statuettes illustrating every aspect of native Guatemalan life. In the miniature village was a market with fruit and vegetable-vendors. Near rivers and lakes made of silver paper, women were bathing or washing clothes. Shepherds in local costumes watched cattle graze on fields of green-dyed sawdust, and porters and laden mules filled roads indicated with fine sand. Above the manger and the beautifully sculptured statues of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph hung the largest star. Festoons of *mansanilla,* a small yellow fruit which ripens in December and whose penetrating fragrance is the distinctive odor of Christmas time in our country, trimmed the front part of the *nacimiento.*

My American friend found the nine *posadas* that went on from December sixteenth until Christmas Eve to be full of novelty. Each *posada* or sheltering ceremony led us into a different home in the parish to which my family belonged.

Two statues some two feet high of the Virgin and St. Joseph were brought in procession from our local church, accompanied by a big crowd under the direction of Father Solis and Mother Margarita. The people were singing Christmas carols and playing native instruments. When the Virgin and St. Joseph reached the first of the nine homes, they found the door of the *nacimiento* room closed. Within the room waited the masters of the house and a singer who, when three knocks announced the arrival of the procession, softly asked in song, "Who is there?" The soloist accompanying the procession responded in a plaintive chant, "We are Mary and Joseph, seeking a shelter for the night. Give us a resting place. We ask it in God's name." After further queries and answers sung to the music in use among us since the Spaniards came to Guatemala, the door opened and the statues of Mary and Joseph were made welcome and put in a place reserved for them in the *nacimiento.*

The entire company then knelt and said the prayer we call the Novena of the Holy Child, after which everyone joined in a party. Refreshments were served, the young folk danced, and the older people played cards or chatted far into the night. Each evening the same ceremony was repeated until the statues of the Virgin and St. Joseph had visited the nine homes—nine parties which we thoroughly enjoyed. On Christmas Eve, the statues were returned to their church and we all gathered there for Midnight Mass, called *la Misa del Gallo,* after which we went to a *fiesta* and danced till dawn.

A family reunion was scheduled to take place at our coffee plantation of Retana right after the Feast of the Three Kings, on January 6. Meanwhile Dorothy and I secretly aroused the interest of my cousins, Margot and Toya, of my brothers and of our old friend, Alberto Orive, just back from his studies in California, in our plan of climbing Agua Volcano. We delayed talking openly of the project, for my mother had always strongly opposed our making the trip as she had heard of accidents along the steep narrow path to the summit.

Fortunately the governor of the state of Sacatepequez, in which Retana and the volcano are located, Colonel Rafael Yaquian, and his wife also came to visit my parents at the coffee plantation and we found him heartily in sympathy with us. Thanks to all the promises he made to help us, my mother's objections were overruled and one morning we set out toward the alluring volcano. There were twenty-one in the party, including kind uncle Meme as chaperon.

On our way, we stopped a moment at Carmona, my eldest brother Luis Pedro's coffee plantation, to pick up several baskets of fruit prepared for us by his wife and their charming daughter Chitilla. Then we proceeded to Santa Maria, the last town before the ascent, where we were welcomed by Don Rafael and a local band.

Such an expedition was not then as common as nowadays and elaborate preparations had been made for it. Don Rafael sent veritable caravans of Indians to carry food and water ahead of us, and other men worked to repair the trail.

The Indian mayor of Santa Maria had arranged a festival in our honor and we lingered to enjoy it. The mayor, dignified in his showy costume, took us into a hall where there was a buffet luncheon and a marimba playing gay melodies. Here were all sorts of delicious native dishes, stuffed *chiles, pepian, tamales, enchiladas.* After dancing a couple of rounds of the popular *son,* to the immense satisfaction of our host, we foregathered in the plaza and mounted the horses and mules awaiting us. In high spirits we said good-bye to Don Rafael and the mayor and singing in chorus our national anthem we began the excursion.

The path soon became so narrow that we had to go single file. From the Indian guide walking ahead, warnings of dangerous spots to watch for were called back from one person to the next, accompanied with appropriate wisecracks intended for those of us not too at ease on muleback.

The trail for a long time wound steeply through irregularly shaped bits of cultivated land that the local Indians tilled patiently by hand and that looked like a giant jigsaw puzzle painted in various shades of green. Every moment the panorama below us became more extensive, ever lovelier.

Then came the area of virgin forest, of tremendous ancient trees towering beside deep ravines where torrents roared under the darkness of the foliage. Long vines hung from trees whose enormous trunks proved that the volcano must have been extinct for countless centuries. I noticed a variety of orchids growing in the joints of branches and the curious way twisted roots resembled mossy serpents.

I was in the lead with only the guide, Chepe, ahead of me. He and I carried on a busy conversation about the volcano and its forest as we rode along. He pointed out the strange *flores de palo,* which are sprouts that burst through the bark of trees, opening out like large flowers. He told me that this forest still has many wild animals. The *tecuanburro* is one of the rarest, a beast which eats only the entrails of its victims. Coyotes always follow it to eat the rest of the freshly killed game.

"The most destructive of all animals among our crops," Chepe said, "are the monkeys. They do so much damage that we have set a price on their heads. I have made some money by killing monkeys but once when I might have killed three of them easily, I could not bring myself to do so. There was a father monkey, a mother and her baby. The father was just back to the forest from a raid on our fields, and had two ears of corn under one arm. The female came down toward him with her baby clutching her around her neck. The three gathered close together on a branch and the father peeled the husks from one ear and gave it to her. He husked the second ear and nibbled some of the grains. I raised my gun and took aim. But then I saw him gently feeding the corn he had chewed to the baby monkey. My good old gun was eager but I was unable to pull the trigger."

When the lush forest ended, there was nothing but high dry grass before us. Unhampered by trees, the view was breathtaking as the mules struggled up the steep incline and at last reached the great cleft in the flank of the crater through which, they say, the waters gushed down centuries ago to wipe out Guatemala's first great Spanish city, that of Alvarado and La Sin Ventura.

We all were excited as we rode into the crater. It was a strange deserted world to itself, a vast deep enclosure, like an amphitheatre where Indian gods might have been acting out a drama a moment before. Short grass and rocks covered the bottom, and uneven jagged ridges, some of them four hundred feet high, closed it all around except for the break through which we arrived.

Being more than 12,000 feet above sea level, it was intensely cold, so we hurried to examine the thatched cane pavilion which had been built to house us for the night. The Indians had spread straw heavily over the floor and stacked against the cane walls discarded coffee bags filled with straw to give us better protection against the cold. We unfolded rugs on the floor, stretched a curtain across one section to give us girls some privacy, prepared several lamps, and on a sandy spot in the hut we lit a small oil stove which soon radiated its welcome warmth.

Before climbing to the cliffs we unpacked some of the baskets of food and enjoyed a light lunch of cold ham and salads "sprinkled" with champagne that Alberto had brought to celebrate the ascent.

Only Chepe and three other guides stayed with us, the other Indians returning to their village that afternoon. The four servants piled saddles in the entrance to the crater so that our mules and horses could be free to graze but could not escape during the night. They built a great crackling fire near the hut where they began preparing their evening meal and around which they would sleep.

Up we scrambled to the ridge round the crater. The sight was gorgeous—truly beyond description. Although it was difficult and dangerous we walked all around the circumference, going up and down the uneven cliffs. It took us almost two hours to accomplish the whole tour as we stopped many times to admire the scenery. The sky was crystal-clear and with binoculars we were able to see the frontiers of Mexico and British Honduras on one side and on the other side those of Salvador and Honduras across the chain of volcanoes and mountains that form the Sierra Madre which runs like a spine through Central America. Far off were the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans to which the rivers flowed like thin silver ribbons. Near us were the three colossal Fuego volcanoes. And further away, filled with sunshine, were the plains planted with coffee and sugar cane which extended on and on until they blended with the horizon. Then, lying like mirrors beneath the gleaming sun were the lakes and, scattered here and there through the land the cities and towns appeared like little toys.

The sun was beginning to set when we finished our jaunt around the rim of the crater and we all sat in groups on the highest crest to marvel at the transcendent hues which came from the golden ball while it was sinking, surrounded by a bright cloud of gilded dust, beneath the line where the sky and the earth seemed to meet. The panorama which had been bathed with orange tints became darker as the sun's farewell rays declined and a soft twilight succeeded.

The stars like diamonds suspended in the universe came out one by one and never have I seen them so brilliant as in the heavens of that unforgettable evening.

Then the moon rose—a wonderful silver shield, moving first with a perceptible motion and afterwards more slowly as it ascended, shedding its blue beams over the world.

The beauty of the night was sublime, the air around us so silent that we wondered whether it had not lost its power of conveying sound.

At eight o'clock we broke the spell, as we had promised our relatives to send up colored rockets. The green comets spelling "All's Well" were shot off noisily into the sky to reassure our families that we had arrived safely. Soon after, we stiffly got to our feet and now as noisy as we had been silent we hurried tumbling down into the crater crying out our hunger. The pavilion was nice and comfortably warm compared with the cliffs. We lit the lamps and spread table cloths over the rugs, gathering around to relish a good hot meal.

Dorothy, the only "North American" among us, kept asking questions about the volcano during the supper and was eager to know who had been the first white man to climb it.

"Remesal, that enterprising friar whose chronicles of the early days of the Conquest are still so fascinating to read, was the first to reach the summit," my brother Jorge answered. "He was working at Santiago in 1615 on his history of Guatemala, often pausing in his scribbling to look out the window of his monastery cell at the lovely and mysterious peak from which such a terrible flood had come to engulf the former capital. One day in November of that year he no longer was able to restrain his curiosity. Throwing aside his quill pen, he ordered his servant to saddle two mules while he packed some food and blankets. The two started immediately on a journey which in those days seemed terribly dangerous. The Spaniards feared Agua Volcano's wild animals, its unknown natural perils and supernatural powers related traditionally to the death-dealing peak, where the Indians said their old king Quicab the Great was buried. There was no trail at all on the volcano but in Santa Maria Friar Remesal found an Indian who agreed to guide him. Remesal was acclaimed with joy and relief by his fellow citizens on his safe return and everyone marvelled at his adventures in the jungle, his tales of its beasts and at the large piece of ice he brought back with him from the peak."

"This Mayan king, Quicab the Great, whom Jorge just mentioned," said Doctor Norberto Galvez, one of our companions, "had dreamt that his people would be subdued one day by white men and asked to be buried here so as to punish them. The Indians, like many persons all over the world, have an elaborate set of interpretations of dreams. Many of them probably trace back through centuries to the days of the Maya. If the Indians dream of cooked meat, they expect to receive money soon, but if the meat is raw, they will lose money. Dreaming about a horse means you are soon to leave unexpectedly on a journey. Someone is going to betray you if you dream of a cat, and it will be a particularly cruel blow to you, if the cat is black. Seeing ants indicates future prosperity. A dream in which a woman embraces a man means that the man will be called to military service. A married man who dreams that fierce dogs are attacking him can expect his wife to be unfaithful. Dreams of great wealth forecast poverty. To dream that one is intoxicated means there will be a fire in your house."

"You notice, Dorothy, that most of these dream interpretations stress the pessimistic," my brother Carlos interrupted. "But there are all sorts of superstitions and spooks which have a comic side. For instance, there is the Duende, one of the most familiar of ghosts in whom the Indians believe. He was outwitted at least once in his efforts to win innocent souls for the devil."

According to the legend, the Duende usually shows himself as a hideous old man impervious to bullets and so sinister in appearance that whoever sees him becomes paralyzed with fear. Sometimes the Duende changes himself into an animal if that will help outwit his victim. One day, he saw several little boys playing in a field, galloping about on broomsticks. The Duende thought to himself, "How can I catch all these boys and take them to my master the Devil?"

After some stroking of his greenish beard he decided, "As an ugly old man I could only catch one or two of them. But as a horse I may be able to ride away with the whole band of children."

So he changed himself into a big and amiable looking horse with soft eyes and something like a smile on its lips, and trotted at a friendly pace into the field where the children were.

"How about a ride?" he said in a very mellow horsy-sounding voice.

Eagerly the little boys started scrambling on his back, some helping their friends, others pushing rivals off to have more room.

The weakest and smallest of the children was waiting until the others would pull him up onto the horse's back when he noticed a strange thing. The beautiful horse had no tail.

"I'll fix that," he said and tried to put his broomstick in the place he thought a tail properly belonged. This hurt the Duende so much that he screamed like the Devil himself, shook the little boys from his back and dashed off into the hills.

"The Devil is certainly a most active and ingenious creature," Alberto laughed, "and that is one of the few times I have heard of his not succeeding when he has set himself to capture a soul. Once in the year 1592 he even did our country a great service—at the price of a human soul."

The illustrious Don Rodrigo de Fuentes y Guzman was mayor of Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala in those days and was energetically improving communications in the surrounding country. He set one of the best Indian builders to constructing a mighty bridge over the Rio de los Esclavos which flows toward the Pacific Ocean. Hundreds of slaves were assigned to the task but no matter how cruelly the builder in charge beat them, they were unable to make headway as rapidly as Don Rodrigo had ordered.

Much dissatisfied, the mayor upbraided the Indian builder and warned that if the bridge was not finished by a certain date the man would be thrown into jail for the rest of his life. The poor fellow did his best but on the eve of the appointed day, much remained to be done. The Indian sharpened his machete, determined to slit his throat that night rather than be imprisoned. But the Devil appeared before him and offered to complete the bridge for him. In his despair, the man signed away his soul as the price demanded for this service. Next day the workmen were dumbfounded to see that nothing remained for them to do

—the bridge which you can see today, some four hundred feet long, with eleven sturdy arches over the water, was completed to the smallest detail. When Don Rodrigo arrived he was delighted and gave the builder a bottle of brandy as a reward for his punctual completion of the job. It is said that the good mayor was unable to forget the sad look in the eyes of the builder as he guzzled the liquor, and only later learned why the Indian was so miserable in his hour of triumph.

"Dorothy," my brother Arturo added, hoping to tease our American friend, "it is only fair to warn you before you visit Antigua that many of that city's houses are haunted. In fact when someone buys a house there, it is usual for the seller to specify that the ghost of the house is included in the deal."

He went on to tell about the Cadejo, a horrible black animal, half goat and half lamb, with long horns, red eyes, hoofs of a bull and tail of a lion, which is reported from many parts of the countryside and specializes in terrifying dogs who at night howl at his sight. And he narrated some of the better-known ghost tales of Antigua beginning with that of the Barraneches.

In the old house which once belonged to the Marquis of Barraneche, ghosts have wandered for generations. The marquis and his brother, who was inseparable from him, were among the wealthiest mine owners of the country some centuries ago. The luxury of their home in the old capital was proverbial. They had the finest jewels, the best horses and carriages. Their silk and velvet clothing was embroidered with real pearls and their shoes had diamond buckles and heels of solid gold.

But one day the brothers found it necessary to visit

Spain. As there were no banks in which to leave their huge treasure, they ordered a number of earthen jugs called *botijas,* and filled them with jewels, gold and silver. At night, helped only by their faithful steward, they buried the jars among the flowers of the patio. Years passed and as no news came from the travelers it was assumed that they had died in a shipwreck. The steward lived on all alone in the splendid mansion, forever awaiting their return. He grew to be very old and, in 1773, when the city was destroyed by the great earthquake, he perished among the ruins of the building he had guarded for such a long time, without ever saying where the treasures were buried.

When the transfer of the capital to Guatemala City took place, the Barraneche estate was sold reasonably but nobody seemed able to live happily there. The people who rebuilt the mansion were constantly disturbed by the ghosts of the two brothers of long ago who roamed the building and garden late at night attired in their velvets and laces, with long feathers in their wide hats and swords glittering by their sides in the moonlight. The ghosts were very polite. They attacked nobody but made an infernal racket, entering locked rooms, moving furniture around, opening drawers. They were recognized by the peculiar sound of their gold heels on the tiles, a sound which frightened the residents terribly.

Among the properties of the Barraneche brothers was a house attached to one of their mines not far from the city. The overseers of the slaves at the mine had been cruel and many had died from horrible tortures. When the house was repaired and became the center of a coffee plantation it was found to be haunted by a number of ghosts, spirits much less refined than those of the Barraneches.

Just recently a friend of ours, a brave man free of superstition, was invited by the owner for a visit to the haunted plantation, precisely so that he could see for himself what went on there among its spooks. The owner who lived in the capital, incidentally, had no doubt about the existence of the ghosts but had learned to get along with them and was quite indifferent about their sharing the house with him when he came to inspect his property.

At midnight following his arrival, our friend heard frightful groans followed by steps in the corridor before his bedroom. He was sure his host was playing pranks on him and stayed in his room. The following night the same dismal sounds and the same curiously unnatural steps were heard but when he opened his door all was again silent. The third night he left his door ajar and when the groans were repeated, rushed out but saw no one. The fourth night, his curiosity led him to hide in some bushes in the patio where he waited uneasily for midnight. No sooner had the clock struck twelve when groans and steps were heard in the corridor. He was peeking from the bushes in the direction of the sounds when his arms were violently grabbed from behind while a breath of fetid cold air blew on the nape of his neck. He turned, still thinking it was a joke, but saw only a shadow disappearing in the direction of the abandoned mines. Back in his room, he found deep red bruises as if burned by charcoal on his arms. Only then did he become truly fearful, and from then on kept his door locked every night, nor would he go outside on any pretext until the sun rose. Fearing to be ridiculed he said nothing of his experience.

Some days later, the plantation owner and a number of friends gathered there for the Holy Week festivals. On

Good Friday, after they had all returned to the house from witnessing the processions in Antigua, the ladies retired and the men, five in all, sat late into the night playing cards. At midnight groaning and footsteps were heard approaching from a distance. Not wishing his guests to be disturbed, the host shrugged indifferently when questioned, and said, "It must be my wife urging me to come to sleep. Don't mind her." One of the poker players looked out and finding the corridor empty decided to go and hide in the bushes of the patio to spy out who could be making the noises.

"I wouldn't do that!" our friend cried, but refused to explain why he urged the other not to go. So, joking about it all, the guest went out and the others continued their game.

Some minutes later the poker players heard the same groans and steps, followed by a terrible scream. Rushing out they found their companion standing among the bushes. He was trembling, white-faced and with his hair literally standing on end. He had been grabbed from behind and bore painful red marks on his arms.

"That," our friend then confessed, "is why I urged you not to go out."

"A somewhat similar yet more amiable experience with the spirits of the other world," one of my cousins asserted, "concerns one of our most famous poets, José Batres Montufar. It is said that he and a group of friends used to meet regularly in the residence of a distinguished family in Guatemala City. He had made a pact with the lady of the house that whoever of them died first should return to tell the other if there was really a hell. The evening following the death of the poet, all his friends were there lamenting his departure at the premature age of thirty-three, when suddenly they heard footsteps in the corridor that sounded like his. They stared at one another and a horrible feeling crept over them when they heard the signal that had been agreed upon—three knocks on the table and the poet's voice clearly saying, 'There *is* a hell, my friends.' "

Another of my cousins had been listening with a smile of incredulity to these tales, whispering now and then to Dorothy, who seemed just a bit more credulous. We were therefore surprised when she announced that she too had heard of ghosts whose activities appeared well authenticated.

According to her story, a lady from Guatemala City who had become crippled by rheumatism, recently rented a house in Antigua, built on land occupied previously by a convent, so as to get relief at the nearby hot springs of San Lorenzo. She moved into the furnished dwelling with her daughter and two servants. The day following their arrival the servants, Indian girls from a remote village, complained that they had been unable to sleep. "Ghosts that looked like nuns repeatedly came and pulled our blankets from us and pinched our toes," they said. The lady laughed them to shame for their superstitious imaginings and jokingly told them, "If ghosts bother you again, tell them to come and visit me instead."

For some days nothing happened, and the servants returned to their former cheerfulness. Then, late one night, the lady called to her daughter who slept in the same room, asking her to fetch a drink of water from the dining room. As the girl walked through the corridor, she saw a white-robed figure whom she took to be one of the servant girls.

"Why aren't you in bed, Catarina?" she asked.

But the figure continued advancing silently toward her.

As it came closer the girl looked attentively at it. Suddenly she screamed and fell unconscious onto the tiles. At her horrified cry, her mother limped out to where she lay. All the girl could say as she began to recover was, "A ghost! a ghost!"

Half carrying her daughter, the sick woman hobbled toward their bedroom. As they neared its door, a murmur of soft voices back of them made the mother turn around. There in the corridor phantoms looking like nuns were walking along in the direction of the garage, which the mother now recalled had long ago been the convent's chapel.

In a panic she closed her door and rushed to a window, calling a policeman who sat dozing on the steps of a shop across the street. The news of what the woman had seen did not upset or surprise him.

"Why worry?" he chuckled softly. "They are familiar to us and I have known about them all my life. They are only poor inoffensive nuns who leave their graves on certain nights to pray in what was once their chapel. Their ghosts would not harm anyone so you should just forget them and go to sleep."

But the woman who had never believed in ghosts was not to be so easily reconciled to living with them. She bribed the policeman to spend the rest of the night on guard in the patio of the house and at dawn hurried back with her daughter and servants to Guatemala City. The daughter continued to suffer from the shock for some weeks. According to her, the ghost she had seen was hideous.

Most of us girls were getting rather jittery by now, and I even caught Dorothy glancing anxiously over her shoulder to the corners of the weirdly lit pavilion. The men, however, seemed to have an inexhaustible store of horror tales on tap. Finding that some of the girls were frightened their courage increased and they argued as to who should tell his favorite story next. The young men tossed a coin to decide who would have the privilege of frightening us once more. My cousin, "el Canche," won and told the following:

Years ago there lived in Antigua an Indian carpenter with a shrewd wife of his own age and race. They had been married fifteen years and he had long ago tired of her. A young girl came into his life and the man desperately cast about for some way of ridding himself of his wife. Divorce had recently been made legal by the progressive anticlerical Guatemalan government but it required more money than he could afford.

As the man sat by himself one night in a shabby tavern, gloomily sipping his brandy and speculating hazily on whether he should murder his wife, he overheard someone at a nearby table talking about a house in the city that was for rent for only ten dollars a month.

The nearby voice described the house as old and comfortable. . . but haunted. That was why it was offered for rent so cheap. The ghosts had almost frightened the owner to death.

Pondering this news, and emboldened by many drinks, the carpenter tottered home and told his wife that he knew of a house for rent that was much better than the one they were in. He refrained from telling her about the ghosts, nor did he mention what he had learned of the early history of the house. Some decades ago it had belonged to a rich old miser who frequently quarreled with his profligate son. The old man eventually chased his son away because the youth refused to work and was constantly asking for money, but the son often came back to request funds from his father, sometimes noisily threatening to kill him if his demands were not satisfied, and the people living close by could often hear them fighting.

Neighbors were used to seeing the old man go to mass each morning. Following a particularly fierce quarrel between the miser and his son, they noticed that he had not gone out for some days. They notified the police who discovered the body of the son in the entrance or *zaguán* of the house, but were unable to find any trace of the father. From the wounds on the body of the young man and the reports of the neighbors, the police concluded that the two men had fought furiously, the son had killed his father and hidden the body, but also had been mortally wounded.

The wife of the carpenter, knowing nothing of these gloomy happenings, cheerfully installed herself in the house and began sweeping its long neglected rooms. It did seem somewhat strange that her husband should have sent their three children away precisely that day to visit his mother in Guatemala City, but the wife was rather glad for their absence since she was eager to do her cleaning undisturbed. Even when her husband went out that evening promising to be right back, and then failed to appear, she was unruffled. The Indian woman had lived all her life in the outskirts of the city in miserable shacks and was thrilled at being at last in a veritable mansion. Before her husband left she had talked enthusiastically about how she would make the house attractive to live in, nor did she notice how sneeringly he smiled while she talked.

The sun set and the house got dark, for as yet there was no electric service in the city of Antigua. But the energetic housewife went right ahead scrubbing the floor of her bedroom by the light of two candles. While thus occupied she heard footsteps in the corridor and saw the silhouette of a man pass in front of her door, heading toward the dining room. Thinking it to be the owner, anxious to meet his new tenants, she hurried to the door, calling, "Buenas noches, señor!" But as the man did not answer, she returned to her cleaning. Some moments later she heard grumbling sounds followed by a terrific clatter coming from the dining room. Tiptoeing to the door, she perceived vaguely the same shadowy man half dragging, half carrying a burden as he tottered toward the second patio. Some time after, while she still stood at her door, the shadow returned, passed once more through the corridor, stopping only when he reached the *zaguán* inside the main door. There he swayed, moaning as if in great pain and then seemed to disappear.

She stayed at the door of her bedroom, scratching her head as Indians do when puzzled. Soon another vague figure came by. This one looked like the shadow of a very old man, bent with age and with the burden of a big white bag held in his arms. Although the woman was deeply superstitious, curiosity was stronger in her than fear. So she took up one of her candles and slipped silently on bare feet after the strange figure. The apparition vanished into a room that was pitch dark. She followed, but saw no one there. As she stood with mouth open, searching the corners with her candle, the halting steps of an aged man were heard in the attic overhead, and from above the wooden ceiling came a clink-clink as of coins being counted.

By now she had become alarmed and rushed back to her room, locked her door and put her two candles in front of a poor lithograph of the Virgin *del Rosario,* the first of her few treasures to have been installed when the woman arrived in her new home. All night she knelt before the Virgin, praying fervently, lighting candle after candle until the sun rose and the weird sounds finally ceased echoing through the house.

The beating of her heart gradually communicated to her brain the idea that her husband had known the house to be haunted. "Why!" she thought, "He left me alone in the hope that I would die of fright during the long night." Vague memories came back to her of stories heard long before about ghosts in that neighborhood. Her husband's eagerness in sending away their children now became understandable to her. She saw at last why her husband had taken this house. Nor did she fail to recall how much more attractive than herself was the "other woman" with whom she knew her husband to be infatuated.

The darkness of night makes us more emotional while daylight arouses our courage. As the sunlight flooded her room after the long frightful night, the woman's fears changed to anger. And as there is nothing like anger to increase courage, she soon found herself walking toward the room in which the older of the two ghosts had vanished. Examining it carefully, she found only a ladder and two or three empty trunks. But she saw indications that there might be a secret trapdoor in the ceiling. Sure enough, when she climbed the ladder and shoved, the boards overhead gave way and she entered a dusty attic. Clambering into the dusky space below the roof tiles, she dimly saw many bags dangling from the beams. The first she touched gave a sound of metal. Untying it, she carried it to her bedroom and emptied it onto her bed. It was filled with gold coins, a wealth such as she had never before set eyes upon.

"I will laugh last and best, my dear husband!" she mumbled to herself as she counted the beautiful ancient gold pieces. "You hoped that I would die of fright so you could marry that woman, but instead I am alive and rich now. I'll keep the money for myself and treat you as you deserve from now on."

She locked the door of the room leading to the attic, took a few strengthening cups of strong coffee, and hurried to her brother, the sexton of a nearby church. To him she told the whole story, except that she cannily described the treasure as just one bag of gold. Her plan, she explained, was to continue living in the house, and to buy it. But not wishing her husband to know what she had in mind she needed her brother's help. With the sexton she went to the house owner who was delighted to sell the property for much less than it was worth when he saw that she could pay in cash and in gold.

The sexton told the priest of his church about the ghosts. The good man eagerly accepted an invitation to go that evening to the house and try to release the wandering spirits from their torments.

Meanwhile the woman had returned home. Her husband had preceded her and seemed amazed to find her well and . . . alive. "Did you sleep well?" he asked in a puzzled tone.

"Never better in my life," she answered. "At last I have a decent house to live in."

The Indian scratched his head, nonplussed, and went to his workshop, still unable to figure out how the ghosts had failed to scare his wife to death.

That evening the husband once more said good-bye, assuring his wife he would return soon. Within himself he planned to spend the night out in the hope that by morning the ghosts would have killed her with fright.

Soon after his departure, the wife's brother and the priest arrived, bringing with them holy water and a number of scapularies and rosaries. These the priest hung on the sexton and his sister. For some time the three sat in semi-darkness in the woman's room with its door ajar. The priest listened without surprise while the first ghost passed as it had the night before toward the dining room, nor did he bulge from the door as it went by dragging its burden to the second patio. When the priest saw the second and older ghost coming through the corridor he courageously went out to meet it, followed timidly by the sexton and the woman who were holding hands, trembling, more dead than alive with fear.

The brave padre addressed the ghost. "Are you of this or the other world?" As the ghost pointed upward, he went on. "In the name of God, what can I do to relieve your sufferings?" In answer the ghost motioned with its bony hand, beckoning the priest to follow. The sexton took a lamp in his shaking fingers and he and the woman went behind the priest who walked calmly after the ghost. They all passed the first and second patio and had almost come to the end of the third courtyard when the ghost stopped and pointed downward, at a place in the garden covered by stones. After making this gesture, the spirit disappeared.

The sexton and the woman had regained their courage by witnessing the serene self-possession of the priest and with zeal helped him dig at the spot the ghost had indicated. Some three feet under the surface they came upon a skeleton, some wisps of white hair that crumbled to dust before their eyes and a pair of gold cuff links bearing the initials of the old man who owned the house years back and who had been missing.

The woman persuaded the good priest not to make the discovery public since she wished to avoid attracting attention to her recent ownership of the building. The priest gathered the bones together and discreetly carried them away in a box for Christian burial. After that he returned and went from room to room of the house, scattering holy water and saying prayers to exorcise any spirits that might remain in the place. The woman gave him a generous amount of gold with which to pay for masses for the souls of the old miser and his brutal son. From then on their ghosts no longer bothered her and the house became one of the quietest you could find in all Antigua.

Following the advice of her brother the sexton, the woman altered the house, arranging one of its rooms as a tidy grocery store where she soon found herself making a good profit. She gradually explored the attic, and little by little took to Guatemala City the gold she had discovered in the bags hanging there. In the modern capital she invested the money in sound real estate, acting always so secretly that no rumor of her good fortune ever came back to Antigua.

The husband was so impressed with his wife's ingenuity in making their home attractive and with her success in the grocery store that he abandoned the girl he had been in love with and settled down as a model, home-loving spouse. The two were on such cordial terms that years later he even confessed to his wife how he had tried to have her killed by the phantoms' sight.

It became quite a joke between the aging couple. But the wife never let her husband know the truth of how they had become prosperous. That silence was her revenge.

As the story ended, we all thought it was time to rest. The curtain was pulled, and we girls arranged our mats close to each other. Soon we were sound asleep.

Next morning Chepe woke us at five and we hurried up to the crater's rim to watch the sun rise. The scenery was unique and magical. While one side of the sky reflected the bluish beams of the moon, which was lowering to the horizon, the other side became suffused with rosy and golden tones as the sun appeared. The two worlds of color blended high above. It seemed as if we who stood at the summit of the legendary Agua Volcano were looking up into the heart of a fantastically huge opal!

11

THE EMERALD PHOENIX

Guatemala City

We modern Guatelmaltecos find in our capital, Guatemala City, the summing up of the history of our beloved country. In the city's picturesque vast marketplaces you see Indians in costumes of Chichicastenango, Atitlan, and countless other villages. Their faces are strikingly similar to those on the rare and priceless, ancient Mayan relics in our splendid National Archaeological Museum here in the capital. Then there is a huge colorful relief map in the Minerva Park which dramatizes the beauty of our nation's volcanoes and mountains, lakes and rivers—the only map of its kind in the world. Monuments scattered through Guatemala City's parks and along its promenades evoke the heroes of our struggle for independence and nationhood. In the numerous churches are treasure troves of paintings, carvings, jewels associated with the glories of the Spanish conquistadores. And there are magnificent buildings including the beautiful Palacio Nacional to demonstrate the skill of our modern-minded young architects.

When the capital was moved from earthquake-shattered

Santiago (now called Antigua), during the decade that saw the founding of the republic of the United States, the site chosen was already widely known through pious traditions. Here within the modern capital you still can admire a lovely hill, el Cerrito del Carmen, which stands out conspicuously, recalling two hermits who made the place famous in early colonial times.

I heard about the first of the two hermits from an old Spanish friar named Modesto who came to chat almost every evening with our gardener, Merejildo, when I was a little girl. Whenever I saw the two old men sit down on a bench in the patio, among the flower beds, I used to slip away from my governess and listen as Fray Modesto told with many dramatic pauses and gesturings the story of the broken-hearted youth who first founded a hermitage on this hill in the latter half of the sixteenth century.

This charming young cavalier was called Antonio. He belonged to a wealthy family of Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala and was very happy because he was engaged to Carmen, the sweetest señorita in the old capital. Finally the day arrived for their wedding, to be celebrated with a brilliant fiesta. Carmen was even more excited and in love than Antonio—if that were possible. It seemed that the future smiled and beckoned onward this fine couple, promising them many years of joy and of boundless mutual devotion.

But as her mother and the maids were attaching the bride's crown and veil, Carmen suddenly clutched her hand to her heart, groaned with pain and fainted. Her father, Antonio, and a doctor who was among the guests rushed to her as they heard screams coming from her room. The physician tried every means of reviving her. Yet Carmen passed away and the fiesta became a scene of tears and sorrow.

Antonio was desperate in his grief, shut himself off from everyone, refused to eat. He had been deeply pious but now could be heard crying out in his room, blaspheming so bitterly that people began to think he had lost his mind. When he grew calm once more he announced his determination to live alone in some solitary spot with his memories of his beloved.

Turning over his possessions to his brothers and sisters, Antonio set out in search of an isolated refuge. A devoted Indian servant rode with him, and they had two pack mules, one laden with bags full of silver coins, the other bearing clothing, blankets, dishes and a painting of the Virgin.

After long travels through the country, Antonio discovered this beautiful hill that today still towers over the broad upland valley. As so many would be later, he was enthralled with the place and its view and decided to stay, naming the hill el Cerrito del Carmen in memory of the dead girl. The servant was sent home with the request that the young hermit be forgotten by family and friends, forever. Here Antonio lived a long time till his death, caring for sick Indians of the neighboring villages, usually alone with his dreams and with the canvas of the virgin that he had brought with him. This had been painted by an uncle of his dear Carmen and the uncle, himself a monk, had made the virgin's face resemble Carmen somewhat. In Antonio's humble abode it hung facing his couch so that his first and last glimpse on waking and when falling asleep was related both to his religion and to the one woman he had loved.

A few years after Antonio died in his hermitage, a Franciscan monk named Juan Croz came from Spain and settled in a cave beside the River de las Vacas at some distance from this hill. En route, he had stopped in Avila, where the great Santa Teresa de Jesus had lived. Her convent still owned a little statue of the Virgin del Carmen which Santa Teresa had wished sent to the missions in America. Juan Croz was entrusted with this sacred carving and brought it here, making a shrine for it in a cave near his dwelling. Later, Indian devotees installed the statue in a chapel where the church of La Parroquia Vieja now stands, but the Virgin was apparently dissatisfied with her new home for her image vanished, reappearing in its original sanctuary. Juan Croz told the Indians that this indicated her desire for a shrine at the top of the hill, which he, like his predecessor, Antonio, called el Cerrito del Carmen—except that to Juan Croz the name recalled Mount Carmel which he had visited in the Holy Land. When the present church on top of the hill was completed for the holy image in 1620, Juan Croz vanished and was never heard of again.

Soon after we returned to Guatemala City from the eventful climb up Agua Volcano, my American friend, Dorothy, and I went to the top of el Cerrito del Carmen from which we looked down across the beautiful capital to the distant chains of mountains that surround the valley. Then we went to pray before Juan Croz's little statue of the Virgin del Carmen, which stands today as it did three centuries ago in its own church, in a niche in the main altar. It is a pretty image, dainty in a dress of silver brocade, with face and hands the color of flesh, an exquisite tiny gold crown on its head, and an aureole around it whose rays are of solid gold each tipped with a silver star. Sheltered under its cape of silvery gray lined with sky blue, are miniature statues of saints.

Dorothy and I were intrigued by many ancient relics in this early church and particularly by a large painting which tells kinetically the story of a sinful man's progression from gay living to the torments of Hell. The sins surrounding the death bed of the wastrel are personified as nude women in this strange old painting.

After visiting el Cerrito del Carmen I took Dorothy to see some of the churches built in the early years following the founding of the capital on this site. Each of the older churches has come to be associated with quaint legends in the course of past generations.

The church of La Merced is the richest of all in its marvelous statuary and paintings, in its altars and luxurious ornamentation. Since the Virgin de las Mercedes is the patroness of lawyers—as well as of prisoners—her feast day on September 24 is always celebrated here with great pomp. In the church is a very old, finely carved confessional which was the scene of a strange event years ago.

At that time there were no electric lights as yet in the city, so the kind priest of La Merced was in the habit of carrying a lantern as he followed the sexton each evening to make sure that all was safely locked up for the night. The clock struck eight while the priest was passing the old confessional. He saw a woman kneeling there, with a black shawl over her head as is customary among the poor. He sent the sexton to tell her to return next day, and went on with his inspection, but the latter recognized the woman as Emilia, a daughter of confession to the priest. She lived a considerable distance away, so the sexton urged him to confess her and he agreed. He sat in the confessional and said the Confiteor Deo, after which he asked her to start her confession. But all he could hear was a whispered, "Bless me, Father!" He did so and thinking her to be disturbed, he said a long prayer to give her time to compose herself. At its end, hearing no sound, he pulled aside the curtain between them. She was gone. Assuming that she had changed her mind about confessing and had left, the priest went on with his duties. The sexton had not seen Emilia leave and the two men remarked upon the strangeness of her conduct. They locked the doors and went to the house where they both lived. There, they found the husband of Emilia waiting. Weeping, he reported that his wife had died just as the clock struck eight. He said her last words as she lay dying were, "Bless me, Father." He added, "I know she was wishing to be near you, Padre, and to hear you pray for her."

The church of Santo Domingo is famous because the architects who directed the building ordered that milk and sugar molasses, which came from the Dominican farms el Rosario and San Geronimo, be mixed with the mortar to make it stronger so that its wide massive walls and vault could resist earthquakes better. Here in Santo Domingo is the most venerated of Guatemala City's many holy images, a six-foot, solid silver Virgin del Rosario. We have an organization of the Perpetual Rosary in the city which arranges for the recital of the rosary by its members hour after hour, day and night, so that there is no moment in the year without this pious rite.

In the same church is an ancient carving of the Recumbent Christ which has survived many vicissitudes. When Catharine of Aragon, daughter of Ferdinand and Isabel of

Spain, sailed for England in 1501 to marry Arthur, Prince of Wales, her family included this fine sculpture in her rich dowry. Soon Arthur died but the British king, to preserve his alliance with Spain, married Catharine to his second son, Henry, who was six years younger than she. The second marriage was as sad as the first for her because, after becoming king as Henry VIII, her husband fell in love with Anne Boleyn, divorcing Catharine. She yearned for her Spanish homeland but stayed on in England till her death so as to care for the interests of her one surviving child, Mary Tudor, who became queen of England in 1553. When Catharine died, the statue of the Recumbent Christ was among her personal belongings sent back to Spain. But the vessel bearing them was looted by pirates. From generation to generation the statue was kept by the pirates, until a buccaneer ship carrying it was wrecked on the coast of Guatemala. Indians appropriated the carving and had it in their village when Dominican friars headed by Fray José de Lazo arrived years later to convert the villagers to Christianity. The sight of their Lord venerated by people who had received as yet no dogmatic teaching about Him, must have seemed in itself a miracle to the ardent missionaries.

Among other sculptures in the magnificent Cathedral of Guatemala City is the Virgin del Socorro, venerated since the earliest days of the Conquest. It stands in its own chapel, its robes glistening with the gems donated to Her through the centuries. One evening some two hundred years or so ago, while the statue was still in the old capital, a thief wrapped in a black cape hid himself behind a column while the sexton was closing the doors for the night. When alone, he climbed to the altar and stole the finest jewel adorning the robe of the Virgin del Socorro, a gift from Emperor Charles V. Just then he heard steps coming from the sacristy and looked about hastily for a place in which to conceal the stolen piece of jewelry. A coffin containing a man recently deceased had been brought into the church to await early morning funeral services. The thief rushed to the coffin and dropped the jewel inside. But as he closed the coffin lid, his cape became caught. When he started to run away the coffin was pulled over and the corpse toppled upon him. His terror must have been so great that his heart failed. Hearing sounds, the sexton hurried to the spot and found the man dead, a horrible expression of fear still on his face.

The tiny sculpture of the Virgin de Loreto in the Church of San Francisco is very ancient. The oft-repeated tradition of how it came to Guatemala traces the statue back through twelve centuries. A royal baby boy was set adrift in Spain's Tagus River by his mother, the infanta Luisa, to save the child from her jealous and cruel uncle, King Witiza of the Visigoths. All this was long ago, before the time of Charlemagne. In the basket adrift in the river, Princess Luisa placed a one-foot statue of the Virgin of Loreto to protect her baby from the evil powers of men and nature. The basket bearing the boy and the protective image drifted far downstream, until a noble came by on the river, rowed by his husky servingmen. He picked it up and took child and statue to his ancestral home in Alcantara. There he provided a chapel for the Virgin's image and reared the baby to be a mighty knight, known as Pelayo.

When Pelayo was finally recognized as of royal lineage, he became the founder of the House of Asturias and took the initiative among Spain's Christian princes in pushing back the Mohammedan invaders to the south. Before the fabulous Pelayo died in 737 A.D., he had kindled a national crusading spirit that culminated in the formation of the modern Spanish realm in the lifetime of Ferdinand and Isabel, at the epoch when Columbus discovered America.

Many centuries after the days of Pelayo, Don Juan Rodriguez de Medrano, a descendant of the noble who had saved the baby boy from the river, stole the sacred statuette of the Virgin de Loreto from its church in Spain just before setting out for Guatemala. When his ship was two days at sea, a frightful storm rose and the captain ordered all baggage jettisoned. With the utmost sadness, Don Juan tossed overboard the little casket containing the precious Virgin.

Next morning the ship was miles further westward. As Don Juan looked out from the storm-swept deck, he recognized the casket bobbing along over the waves close to the ship. It was recovered from the water and the statue was found safe and dry. In Guatemala Don Juan kept the image with him while he lived with a cousin, and when business called him to Peru, he entrusted the statue to his host rather than risk losing it on the perilous journey. Henceforth, Don Juan's cousin led a hectic life for the statue indicated its displeasure in its home by daily moving from room to room. Exasperated, the man consulted a Franciscan monk who concluded that the Virgin desired her image to be in a sanctuary where it would receive the homage of the multitude. So it came about that, after many wanderings and hazards the statue at last found a resting place in Guatemala City's Church of Saint Francis.

From the church of the Franciscans, Dorothy and I drove to the old temple of La Candelaria in the primitive suburbs of the capital. This is a church celebrated for its old-time traditions, for its remarkable Nazarene chiseled by Juan de Aguirre, and because Rafael Carrera, a great political leader following our freedom from Spain, grew up nearby and was baptized here. As we approached La Candelaria, we were fascinated by the music of two Indians squatting by its door. One Indian was thumping on a drum. The second, at the other side of the huge entrance, was blowing away on the native flute or *chirimia*. Once inside, as we paused in the semi-obscurity, a young Indian caretaker approached and I asked him whether he knew what the musicians by the portal were playing.

"It is an old melody about the past glory of the Maya Indian," the young man replied. "But although I cannot tell you precisely what they mean since they are from a far-off village and have ideas different from us here in the capital, I will repeat to you the story of the flute you are listening to, the *chirimia,* that most typical of all our native instruments."

As the caretaker of La Candelaria told us, in early days of the mighty Maya, centuries before the coming of the conquistadores, a cacique or king was more attached to his gay and pretty daughter, Nima-Cux, than to anyone else in all the world. But when she was fifteen, she grew sad and lost interest in her dolls, tame birds, her much petted dog. Nothing made her smile any more.

Fearing she was ill, the king called in the best *brujos* and doctors to examine her. After a careful study of her case, they reported that she was perfectly well but had reached the age to love. So her father invited the neighboring princes to take part in festivities and games. He promised that whoever distinguished himself by his skill and won the affection of his daughter would receive her in marriage and would also get much land and wealth. The roads leading to the cacique's capital became crowded with young men who had heard of the beauty of Nima-Cux and with people of all sorts anxious to watch the tournaments.

On the day set, the king and his daughter sat on the royal tribune. One after the other, the suitors passed before them, prancing and displaying their brilliant costumes, showing off how clever they were. One was a famous warrior wearing a fighting cuirass of pure gold. Many soldiers accompanied him. They held up ears of corn. Their chieftain unfailingly cut the kernels from the ears of corn with his arrows which he shot from a distance. The onlookers cheered him enthusiastically—but Nima-Cux did not even smile.

Another prince came before the princess and the king, bearing a large basket. Out of it crawled an enormous snake. Poison dripped from its glistering fangs. The suitor wrestled fiercely with the snake, displaying courage, grace and skill. Loud cries of praise from the throng rewarded his final killing of the serpent with his bare hands. Nima-Cux, however, was unmoved. If anything, she seemed more melancholy than before.

Many others did great deeds that day but without attracting the favor of the little princess. Last of all came a very young and handsome minstrel. He was so shabbily dressed that everyone was surprised at his impertinence in vying with such dazzling princes for the hand of Nima-Cux.

Looking at the charming princess all the time, the minstrel sang. The sweet tones of his voice touched her deeply. Tears of happiness came into her eyes. She smiled. Gazing at him tenderly, when his song was ended she told him she would marry him if he could sing to her as the birds sing in the woods. The young man, who had loved the princess from a distance since their childhood, vowed that if she gave him the time of four moons, he would comply with her desire.

He went deep into the woods and practiced day after day, studying all the singing birds and trying to gain a voice like theirs. As the moons went by, he grew despondent at his lack of progress. One day as he sat crying under a tree, for the end of the allotted time was nearing, the fairy of the forest suddenly appeared before him. She asked him to cut a twig from the tree above. He did, and gave it to her. Gently and skillfully, she cut the twig the proper length, drew the pith from it and made some holes along it.

Then, returning the piece of wood to the minstrel, she told him, "Move your fingers over these little holes. Blow softly at this end. This is the *chirimia*. With its help you will be able to imitate the birds."

The fairy of the forest passed her hand over the black hair of the minstrel in a caress full of hope and encouragement. Then she disappeared in a flash, before he could thank her.

As the kind fairy had foreseen, the young minstrel found he could now create the same sounds that the birds make. He hurried back to the capital, approaching the palace after dark. Nima-Cux had been anxiously waiting, for the fourth moon was just ending. She recognized the bird-voice out in the night as that of her lover and rushed to him. Her father was overjoyed at the girl's sudden return to her former gaiety and kept his promise, making the young man wealthy and granting him the hand of lovely Nima-Cux.

Something mythical lingers on into modern times in

Guatemala. Our struggles for freedom, our heroes and the symbolism of our flag all are richer and more intriguing because among us no fact seems capable of being bare, even at birth, but is always clothed in some quaint or romantic veil.

Take for example the life of Dr. Mariano Galvez, who may safely be called the Thomas Jefferson of our struggles for liberation from Spanish rule. One night in May, 1794, the noble Doña Gertrudis de Galvez de Fabrique was in her parlor after dinner. She and the women guests were clustered together at one end of the splendid room—for this was one of the wealthiest and most aristocratic homes in newly founded Guatemala City. Her husband, who was a high army officer, and the other men of the party were at the opposite end, busily playing cards. A far-off tinkling indicated to the alert Doña Gertrudis that someone was at the front door. A moment later the butler approached her, bearing a basket.

"When I went to the door this is all I found. No one was in sight. The note attached is addressed to you, Señora," the butler reported and withdrew.

The ladies stared with wonder at the Spanish shawl which was in the basket. They had never seen one more beautiful or more richly embroidered. But the shawl moved! Very much surprised Doña Gertrudis lifted up the fine silk wrap and for a moment the eyes of the ladies were rivetted to the basket. There, under the shawl, lying in a woolen blanket, was a tiny baby boy. Doña Gertrudis read aloud the note that accompanied the "gift." It said, "I entrust him to your kindness. He was born today and has not yet been christened."

The good lady fell in love with the baby immediately.

She and her husband were delighted with it for they were childless and had always yearned for a son. Doña Gertrudis realized from the handwriting of the note and from the rich shawl in the basket that the mother of the child must be an unmarried girl of one of the capital's proud aristocratic families, forced to abandon it to save her family from scandal.

The boy was brought up in the home of his adopted parents, surrounded with every attention, sent to the best schools, and prepared for a career as lawyer. His benefactress and her husband died when he was only fourteen years old, but arranged for friends to carry on the training of young Mariano, who was proving himself charming and intelligent, with exceptional skill in winning the affection of those around him. So popular was he among his fellow students that though the stigma of his birth was widely known, seldom was he humiliated by reminders of it.

Those were days of political restlessness but of social gaiety and romantic ways in Guatemala City, which was still the capital of all Central America. Church festivals and *tertulias* or parties in private homes were the main amusements of old and young folks.

Girls were so severely chaperoned that courtships became highly refined intrigues, intensely exciting, far more romantic than our easier relationships of today. It was usual for a young suitor to show his admiration and love by giving a serenade under the window of his sweetheart. For this he hired an ensemble of guitars and mandolins called *estudiantina,* and a singer—unless he were himself a good vocalist. For two hours or more, sometimes till dawn, the group played and sang softly her favorite tunes.

Special stationery was available for the use of the lovelorn, decorated with cupids, or two hearts linked together by a chain of forget-me-nots. Modern psychologists might have much of interest to say about the psychograms of those days. Since meeting or even writing was at times made so difficult by the vigilant guardians of the city belles, the girl and her swain would make a prearranged plan to look at the moon or a certain star at a fixed time of night, and send a loving tender message to the other by "psychogram."

Stars played a part too in such earnest matters as politics. According to a story my Irish great-grandmother Doña Florence Wading de Asturias used to tell, there was a band of patriots secretly conspiring together in the year 1812 to free Central America from Spain—a movement in which Mariano Galvez was incidentally the youngest member, and which was in tune with similar plottings in other regions of Spanish America. One night, as the conspirators were on their way to their rendezvous, wrapped beyond recognition in black capes that covered their faces to the eyes, they saw an enormous meteor passing through the sky, flooding the moonless scene with a strange bright light. The meteor plunged into the Caribbean with a great explosive noise, sending waves rippling as far as the coast of Nicaragua. Galvez and his friends took this as a good omen from heaven, indicating that light was soon to dispel the darkness of Spanish tyranny, and redoubled their efforts. Meanwhile Captain-General Gavino Gainza, the Spanish-appointed ruler of Central America, was concerned over the incident and increased his persecution of those suspected of agitating against Spain.

Years passed and the party favoring independence grew in strength. At last the skillful diplomacy of Dr. Galvez won over Captain-General Gainza who, flattered by the offer to be the first ruler of a free country, accepted the proposal and notified the Spanish king that Central America had decided in favor of independence. September 15, 1821, was Guatemala's "Fourth of July," the day when our independence was proclaimed.

The next few years were full of restless adjustment as the leaders of Guatemala sought to achieve the full advantage of freedom. Many of them were noble and thoughtful, well-informed. Don José del Valle, who wrote our declaration of independence, initiated the idea of a pan-American union, and gained Simon Bolivar to his view. Our Dr. Simon Cañas prevailed on our leaders to abolish slavery four decades before Lincoln emancipated the slaves in the United States. Some groups favored union with Mexico, some wished the divisions of Central America to be closely linked together, maybe as united as are the states of the United States. Still other leaders struggled through those early years for complete autonomy of each Central American land.

For a very short time all Central America was united with Mexico. Then for twenty-four years the five Central American states, having each its chief of state, held together as a sort of federation or union. But at last in 1847 Guatemala was declared an entirely free and separate nation.

Meanwhile Dr. Galvez had occupied important positions in the government and crowned his brilliant career reaching the heights of power. Too, he at last learned the truth of his birth. The illustrious canon Don Antonio de Larrazabal, whose extreme kindness had always puzzled him, finally informed Galvez that his mother was the canon's own sister, Señorita Maria Felipa and his father the eminent scientist and orator, Dr. José Lopez Rayon, who was already married and was therefore prevented by Church rules from marrying Galvez's mother.

Galvez led Guatemala's government for seven eventful years beginning in 1831. Perhaps influenced by the difficulties he had experienced when growing into manhood because of the stigma of his birth, he inaugurated a number of remarkably modern laws. He legalized divorce, established civil marriage, strengthened civil government to the detriment of the former omnipotence of the priests and monks, adopted the admirable Livingston penal code from the United States, stimulated the education of the humble classes, enfranchised young people from the legal control of their fathers at the age of twenty-one, lightened the taxes of the poor.

As might well be imagined, such rapid and basic reforms profoundly upset the more conservative and pious elements in the country. During his second term, a revolt against him spread, backed by the clergy and the shocked nobility. To forestall further violence, Dr. Galvez resigned and virtually penniless went to Mexico where he soon became famous and wealthy in the practice of law. Paradoxically, although the clergy had so bitterly opposed his legislation in Guatemala, he was so esteemed for his talent and personal integrity that some of his most important clients were in religious orders. Following one of his cases against the Mexican treasury, his clients, Dominican friars, sent him his fee in silver coins. Their gratitude was such that a cart drawn by bullocks was needed to deliver the numerous heavy bags of silver. Galvez also won a case for Great Britain against the Mexican government. Queen Victoria, rejoicing in his success, sent him a gorgeous box in solid gold adorned with rubies which he in turn gave to the

Cathedral of Guatemala where it still can be seen.

Believe it or not, the successor to Galvez, the brilliant cultured liberal, was a full-blooded Indian who scarcely knew how to read or to write his own name. This extraordinary man, Rafael Carrera, when twenty-two years old rose to dictatorial rule over Guatemala by military achievements and thanks to the backing of the aristocrats and priests. He was born and grew up in the capital, in the parish of La Candelaria.

As an illiterate boy Rafael Carrera worked as a servant. By hoarding pennies he got together money enough to buy himself a tiny plot of land, after which he earned a thin living fattening pigs. He had an uncanny instinct for domination and was skilled, when he became powerful, in choosing able men from the country's aristocracy and cultured classes to serve as his advisers. Among these was my great-grandfather, Don Francisco Xavier de Aguirre y Larios, who for some time was Carrera's Secretary of State. Brave, astute and determined, Carrera controlled the nation's destiny for twenty-six years, at first directing others, later himself assuming the post of president.

This well-meaning, gifted and ignorant leader died the same day as Abraham Lincoln: Holy Friday, 1865. He insisted on rising up in his sick bed to pay homage to a religious procession that was passing his windows. The effort was too great for his ailing heart and he fell back dead.

We have been ruled since then by men of many types. Some have tried to emulate the splendid, noble Galvez—notably Miguel Garcia Granados and Justo Rufino Barrios, the leaders of the revolution started by the Partido Liberal. They launched the country in the eighteen seventies on the way to modern life, establishing the Escuela Politécnica, or Guatemalan "West Point," starting construction of railways, tramways, telegraph lines, encouraging the cultivation of unfamiliar export crops such as coffee, restoring Galvez's civil marriage and divorce laws, and decreeing the freedom of worship.

Justo Rufino Barrios, while progressive and public-spirited, was ruthless, coarse, and anti-clerical. He persecuted the aristocrats, who formed the Partido Conservador, expelled the orders of friars and nuns and confiscated their properties. Sixto Perez, one of his henchmen in carrying out mercilessly the expulsion orders, has become legendary. Sixto Perez was a brutal, irreligious and dissipated man who once drove his carriage, loaded with drunken companions and drawn by wild black stallions, into the holiest of Good Friday processions, upsetting the sacred statues. My old Indian nurse said that during Holy Week people sometimes hear the infernal coach of Sixto Perez clattering through the streets late at night.

In many ways Justo Rufina Barrios was a great man, worthy of the tribute paid to him as one of the major personalities of Indian blood the Americas have produced. But his sensibilities as a member of the downtrodden native race led him to exaggerated prejudices against the white race. He took particular pleasure in defying the social rules of the cultured classes.

Characteristic of the man was his behavior at a most elaborate reception in one of the most imposing European embassies in the capital. The fiery young dictator swaggered into the embassy long after the other guests. While all others were decorously dressed for the occasion, Barrios came in wearing his riding breeches, a horse whip as usual in his right hand.

The ambassador was deeply shocked and begged Don Fernando Cruz, then Guatemala's Secretary of Foreign Affairs, to request President Barrios to go home and change his clothes. Don Fernando did so with as much tact as he could muster and Barrios withdrew. Soon after, a servant from the Barrios palace appeared at the party, bearing the president's evening clothes and patent leather shoes neatly arrayed on a huge silver platter. The servant reported that he was instructed to walk about the reception hall the rest of the evening carrying aloft the dictator's clothing, and that Barrios had ordered him to convey the following message to the ambassador: "Since it is the President's clothing you are interested in, he feels he best pays his respects to your country by sending you his clothing in his place."

The ambassador felt that a grave affront had been offered his national dignity and had the servant with his tray thrown out of the embassy. Only Don Fernando Cruz's great diplomatic skill saved Guatemala from a fatal break of relations with one of the greatest nations on earth. The incident was carefully hushed through the years and only now has the humor of it come to be appreciated.

After Barrios, we have had a number of presidents, some kind and civilized, others cruel as Barrios without his quaintness. And not so long ago, for fourteen years, our ruler was a megalomaniacal tyrant who outdid all his predecessors in cruelty without the excuse of humble birth or ignorance.

However critically one may view some governments we have had in the past, Guatemala inevitably has forged ahead. Our laws and educational system today prove that the spirit of Dr. Mariano Galvez hovers benevolently over the land. Our roads and airfields, radio, telephone and lighting systems show that we are in tune with the present century. Ruins of Indian and colonial glories have been restored to much of their original majesty. Hundreds of remarkable philosophers, litterateurs and scientists live in our capital and other Guatemalan cities. Never have the cultured and powerful respected so highly the right of the humble Indian to go his own way. More spontaneously than in other countries, the Guatemalan Indians carry on into the Atomic Age the quaint traditions inherited from the greatest of all ancient Americans, the Maya—traditions descending from times when the plumed serpent and the quetzal, whose plumes the sacred serpent wore, flew confidently all over our land, then as now a symbol of love of freedom.

Having the beautiful quetzal bird as our national emblem in our coat-of-arms and in the heart of our flag, means as much to Guatemalans today as the first coat-of-arms granted them by Emperor Charles V meant to the conquistadores who founded the Very Loyal and Very Noble City of Santiago of the Cavaliers of Guatemala. That ancient emblem, still lovingly remembered and venerated, showed the patron saint of Spain and of Guatemala, Santiago (Saint James), galloping on a fiery steed over the tops of three volcanoes, brandishing his sword—inspiring the brave fighting knights of the sixteenth century to further conquests for their king and creed.

Our present national emblem with its quetzal conveys sentiments of peace, progress and especially liberty—liberty being the greatest of all our desires.

The quetzal bird is very rare nowadays, found only within the more inaccessible forests where grow the giant *aguacatillo* trees on whose fruit the bird lives and on whose soft rotting trunks it hollows out its curious nest. The nest has an exit opposite the entrance, so that the male's splendid blue-green tail feathers cannot get broken or soiled when he leaves the nest.

The male quetzal is about the size of a small hawk, with plumes a rich emerald green. Four to six tail feathers trail far down, long and curving. On his head is a crown of the same color, while his breast bears a showy great splash of bright red.

The name "quetzal" is an ancient Indian word meaning "emerald." During the long centuries of Mayan glory before the arrival of the white man, this bird was as highly revered as it is by Guatemalans today. From early aboriginal sources, and from chroniclers of later times, has come a wealth of legend about this most beautiful of all the birds of the Western Hemisphere. A Quiché-Maya myth tells how the quetzal was created. One evening countless butterflies, some blue, some green, others scarlet, came to rest on the same dead branch of a jungle tree. Next morning the sun rose on a new and wondrous bird, a proud symbol of power, which the gods in the night had fashioned out of all the lovely butterflies that had clustered together the evening before.

It is said that even the great Maya or Aztec rulers were unable to keep the quetzal alive in captivity. One Aztec emperor had a huge aviary of which he was inordinately proud, but never could he hold a quetzal alive in it. The bird's yearning for independence is also said to have caused it to hide deeper than before in the forest as soon as the white man came into the land. In recent years experts have studied the quetzal carefully and found that it holds closely to those areas where the tall *aguacatillo* tree flourishes, partly because the male's wonderful feathers find protection from eager hunters among the similarly colored leaves of that tree. A hundred feet or more overhead among the higher branches, one can still hear the quetzal's strange haunting cry: a double plaintive call, *whee-oo whee-oo,* first uttered very softly, then louder and louder until the whole forest vibrates with it. The bird has high "moral standards," clinging to one wife to whom he is devoted and whom he helps eagerly in raising the young quetzals that issue as fluffy unromantic-looking brownish youngsters from small pale blue eggs.

Guatemala's poets, from anonymous ones of the times of the mighty Maya to the many remarkable modern ones, have always lingered lovingly over the theme of the quetzal, calling it a flower brought to life by the gods, a winged emerald, a flying orchid. One of our young poets, Felix Calderon Avila, has called it a winged thought, a condensation of the evening sky, the soul of jewels and flowers.

Because of its indispensable—vital—freedom, its great charm, the virile beauty of its iridescent plumes and the noble bearing of its crowned head, the quetzal has constantly stirred men's imaginings as the emblem of liberty. For this reason the quetzal is the symbol of my beautiful country, and stands head high in the center of our flag, affirming our faith and cheering us onward.

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